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Effective Leadership Strategies for Retaining Millennial Employees

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2025

Abstract

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Abstract

Millennial employees are likely to leave their jobs when work preferences are unmet. The problem is that business leaders often lack effective leadership strategies to retain millennial employees, which can hamper the productivity and profitability of their organization. Grounded in the transformational leadership theory, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project was to explore effective leadership strategies to improve millennial employee retention rates. The participants were eight experienced business leaders who successfully led and retained millennial employees. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and a review of publicly available resources. Utilizing Braun and Clarke's six-stage thematic analysis model, four themes emerged: adaptive leadership approaches, employee relationship building, fostering growth and development, and employee engagement. Business leaders could study and embody the transformational leadership theory to reduce millennial employee turnover. A key recommendation is for business leaders to look beyond their generational cohort identity and implement adaptive leadership strategies to increase millennial employee retention. The implications for positive social change include the potential for organizational leaders to improve workforce stability, thereby reducing reliance on unemployment benefits and public assistance while fostering long-term economic well-being.

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Dedication

I want to thank my friends who have supported me through both good and bad times. They provided encouragement when needed and good laughs to make hard days pass more quickly. I will not list all of them here for fear of missing someone; I will simply say that they know who they are. I feel incredibly fortunate to have the friends I have in my life.

Heartfelt thanks go to my best friend, Peggy Crosby, for her unwavering support throughout the years. I would not have been able to accomplish this crazy goal of mine without your support and encouragement. Also, a special thank you to my mom and dad for always being in my corner.

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I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Janie Hall and thank her for her patience and persistence with me, as well as for guiding me through the completion of my doctorate. I am deeply grateful that the forces of the universe brought you into my doctoral journey as my first committee chair at the most fortuitous time, as I am not sure I would have continued without your presence and guidance. Thank you so very much.

Even if he is a former Navy officer, not Air Force, I sincerely thank and say "hooyah" to my second committee member, Dr. James Savaard, for his guidance and assistance with my doctoral project. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Jodine Burchell for stepping in for Dr. Savaard and helping me cross the finish line!

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Section 1: Foundation of the Project

Background of the Problem

Millennials' tendency to leave employers often causes concern for businesses in the United States across all sectors because the percentage of employees from this generation in the workforce is high. Millennial employees are less likely to stay with an employer for their careers (AbouAssi et al., 2021). Millennials were born between the early 1980s and the late 1990s (Kollinger & Koris, 2022; Locke et al., 2022; Pertiwi & Prena, 2024). Older millennials have been in the workforce for some time, while the youngest of millennials are a few years from graduating from college and entering the workforce. Eighty-three percent of millennials in the United States were in the workforce in 2023 (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2024a), comprising 44% of the current workforce (BLS, 2024c). The median number of years that employees have been in their current job decreased from 4.1 years in January 2022 to 3.9 years in January 2024, which may be attributed to the increase in millennial workers and a decrease in the number of baby boomers in the workforce (BLS, 2024b). The change in worker age distribution and millennials' propensity to leave employment hastily makes millennial employee retention a business issue and a challenge for company leadership (Galuska et al., 2023; Jena & Nayak, 2024; Spencer & Kalyvaki, 2023). I explored the effective leadership strategies my project participants used to improve millennial employee retention rates.

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The specific business problem studied was that some business leaders lack effective leadership strategies to ensure higher retention rates among millennial

employees, which are needed to sustain quality business decisions and improve organizational outcomes. Therefore, in my qualitative pragmatic inquiry project, I identified and explored effective leadership strategies that some business leaders used to ensure higher retention rates among millennial employees. My research resulted in recommended leadership strategies to sustain organizations' productivity, profitability, and longevity through increased employee retention. The general business problem studied was that some businesses may face work stoppages and quality control issues as retention rates drop due to millennials' tendency to leave jobs quickly and often.

The targeted population consisted of business leaders who employed successful leadership strategies that positively affected the retention rates of millennial employees. I used homogenous purposive sampling. Researchers use purposive sampling to identify a sample group based on specific criteria (Galvan & Pyrczak, 2023). The specific criteria for participants in my research project were individuals who had held leadership positions over millennial employees. My goal was to have a maximum of six participants; however, I continued my project until I reached data saturation. Professional associations and online business networks, such as LinkedIn, served as the sources of participants. Data collection started after Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. The processes to collect data included semistructured interviews and a review of publicly available records and documents. The conceptual framework for the research project was Burns's transformational leadership theory, introduced in 1978 (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). The purposive sampling and semistructured interviews of eight business professionals led to insights that addressed my research question.

Research Question

What effective leadership strategies do business leaders use to ensure millennial employees' retention to sustain quality business decisions and improve organizational outcomes?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

Assumptions can have negative and positive impacts on a project, requiring due consideration. Assumptions are ideas, thoughts, and perceptions that some people consider factual despite a lack of proof (Galvan & Pyrczak, 2023). When designing the project, a researcher should consider any assumptions they or the participants may make (Verostek et al., 2022). Acknowledging assumptions while designing a project may help the researcher control the potential impact of those assumptions (Verostek et al., 2022). I identified several assumptions that affected my project. First, I expected all participants to answer interview questions honestly and openly. Second, I assumed that all participants had successfully retained millennial employees. Lastly, a fair assumption was that the millennial employee retention strategies shared by the potential participants would be effective if implemented by other business leaders reading my project. Contemplating assumptions before a project could impact practical data analysis and conclusions.

Limitations

Limitations are a consideration in any research project because they are issues that may impact a project's outcome. Limitations are often outside the researcher's control

(Galvan & Pyrczak, 2023). Several limitations of my project included inadequate time and funding. Full-time employment and family commitments were limiting factors in completing my project promptly and within the expected time frame of scholarly references of 5 years. The participants presented some limitations, such as being unable to schedule time for an interview due to their busy schedules and unwillingness to be open when interviewed. Another limitation was that participants may have had misguided perceptions of the success of their given leadership strategies and lacked proof of success. Finally, conscious or unconscious researcher and participant bias was another identified limitation. Awareness and analysis of potential limitations impacted the practical collection and analysis of data.

Transition

In my project, I focused on effective leadership strategies for retaining millennial employees. In Section 1, I provide the background on the problematic nature of low millennial employee retention, outline my intention to gain insight into successful retention leadership strategies, and discuss assumptions and limitations. In Section 2, I review professional and academic literature through the lens of transformational leadership theory. I provide an overview of job retention issues related to millennials in the workplace and discuss the characteristics of millennial employees that impact their retention. Next, in Section 3, I focus on the characteristics of my project, including project ethics, the nature of the project, data collection and analytics, and considerations for reliability and validity. In Section 4, I present the findings and their implications for present and future business leaders, social change, and further research endeavors.

Section 2: The Literature Review

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

I thoroughly researched and analyzed the literature available for my research project. Next, I explored existing literature, focusing on peer-reviewed sources when developing a research design critical to my project's outcome. I focused on the scholarly literature on transformational leadership theory, employee retention business problems, and millennial employment characteristics and preferences. Next, I designed my project and refined the interview questions to gather data from the participants by locating and researching relevant scholarly sources. Researchers and scholars use a literature review to provide a framework for the research question. My research question was the following: What effective leadership strategies do business leaders employ to ensure the retention of millennial employees, thereby sustaining quality business decisions and improving organizational outcomes?

I used recent peer-reviewed journal articles related to the conceptual framework of transformational leadership theory to examine the business problem. Researchers and scholars employ a conceptual framework to examine a research topic, focusing on why the business problem is compelling enough to warrant analysis (Galvan & Pyrczak, 2023; Varpio & Ellaway, 2021). The transformational leadership theory's characteristics of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration help leaders challenged with retention issues, particularly those of millennial employees. I explored the business problem through the lens of transformational leadership theory to guide my research project.

In the literature review, I explored existing peer-reviewed articles related to the intricacies of the business problem of some leaders lacking effective leadership strategies for retaining millennial employees, providing evidence and scholarship to support the business problem. I outlined and discussed millennial preferences in the literature review. Millennial preferences include work–life balance (Abbasi et al., 2024; Galdames & Guihen, 2022), interactive leadership styles (Chua & Ayoko, 2021; Spencer & Kalyvaki, 2023), desire for instant feedback (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Galuska et al., 2023), need for meaningful work (Janeska-Iliev & Kitanovikj, 2024; Nabawanuka & Ekmekcioglu, 2022), working in teams (Hassan et al., 2024; Sesen & Donkor, 2023), opportunities for continuous learning (Booysen & Malan, 2024; Larasati & Wisesa, 2023), and capitalizing on mentoring availability (Jung et al., 2021; Rattanapon et al., 2023). Effective leaders could consider millennial preferences and approach them from a transformational leadership theory viewpoint. I utilized resources on the conceptual framework and the business problem to analyze how authors presented the topics. I highlighted key areas of interest to aid in synthesizing the articles for the literature review. My efforts resulted in a comprehensive review and synthesis of the literature on transformational leadership theory, employee retention, and the work characteristics and preferences of millennials.

For the literature review, I searched these keywords: *charismatic leadership*, *coaching*, *corporate social responsibility*, *employee engagement*, *employee retention*, *employee turnover*, *Generation X*, *Generation Y*, *Generation Z*, *generational cohort*, *innovation performance*, *intention to quit*, *job embeddedness*, *job engagement*,

leadership, *meaningful work*, *mentoring*, *millennials*, *motivation*, *multigenerational workplace*, *organizational performance*, *recruitment*, *sustainable leadership*, *transactional leadership*, *transformational leader*, *transformational leadership theory*, *work engagement*, *work–life balance*, and *work meaningfulness*. I used the Walden University multidatabase search tool to find journal articles in the following databases: Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost, Emerald Insight, ERIC, ProQuest Central, ProQuest One Academic, and SAGE Journals.

All journal titles and International Standard Book Numbers were entered into Ulrich's Periodical Directory to verify peer-review status. Ninety-seven percent of journals were classified as peer-reviewed, thereby exceeding the 85% peer-review requirement. With a 2026 project completion date goal, I focused on locating sources published between 2021 and 2025. Ninety-one percent of the 128 sources were published between 2021 and 2025, exceeding the 85% threshold, which is less than a 5-year currency expectation. A few resources exceeded the 5-year currency standard and were seminal works applicable to the conceptual framework of transformational leadership theory or to designing qualitative pragmatic inquiry studies. For example, Burns introduced transformational leadership theory in 1978 (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). Three percent of non-peer-reviewed articles were used to ensure the reliability of my project. Eight government sources were utilized, with seven (88%) published within the last 5 years. The outlier government source over 5 years old substantiated that the federal government's *Belmont Report*, issued in 1979, was consulted when designing my project's ethical guidelines (see Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979).

To summarize, of the scholarly sources used, 97% were peer-reviewed journal articles, of which 96% were published between 2021 and 2025, the 5 years before the expected project completion date (see Table 1).

Table 1

Literature Review Sources

Source	Total	Peer-reviewed %	< 5 years old	% < 5 years old
Total journal articles	113	97%	109	96%
Peer-reviewed journal articles	110			
Non-peer-reviewed journal articles	3			
Official government sources	8	N/A	7	88%
Books	7	N/A	1	14%
Total references	128	86%	117	91%

Application to the Applied Business Problem

Conceptual Framework

In my project, I explored effective leadership strategies for retaining millennial employees. I selected transformational leadership theory as the conceptual framework for my project. Transformational leadership theory provided a suitable lens to study the business problem of millennial employee retention issues because of the power of transformational leaders to motivate and influence employee perception and behavior (see Bass, 1998; Burns, 1978). A leader who studies and implements transformational leadership theory could impact retention rates and improve organizational outcomes.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Individual leaders' abilities to inspire others could positively impact an organization's success. The ability of a leader to inspire and motivate followers' internal moral character by advocating for the greater good of society is the basis of transformational leadership theory, initially introduced by Burns in 1978 (Bass, 1998). The connections between the framework presented and the nature of my project included millennials' preference for jobs with a focus on the greater good (see Booysen & Malan, 2024; Camp et al., 2022) and transformational leaders' ability to motivate employees based on ethical issues (see Bass, 1997; Gan & Voon, 2021; Salanova et al., 2022). Millennials include ethics and corporate social responsibility (CSR) as criteria for selecting prospective employers (Chatzopoulou & de Kiewiet, 2021; Prakash & Tiwari, 2021). Millennials' attention to societal issues such as CSR aligns with transformational leadership theory and a transformational leader's ability to impact employee performance (Thapa et al., 2024). Millennials can opt out of employment when they perceive that a company's ethics and culture do not support causes for the betterment of society (Larasati & Wisesa, 2023; Reavis et al., 2021). A leader's motivating abilities may influence many millennial employees' attributes and could correlate with the transformational leadership theory. Therefore, connecting the lens of my millennial project with the transformational leadership theory was a logical choice.

Theory Origins: Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership theory encompasses various aspects that should be considered, both in part and in whole. Burns introduced the transformational leadership

theory in 1978, and Bass later expanded on the transformational leadership theory in the 1980s (Gan & Voon, 2021; Meng et al., 2022; Sobaih et al., 2022). Under the transformational leadership theory, the leader inspires and motivates the followers' internal moral character by advocating for the greater good of society (Bass, 1985; Lisak & Sampaio, 2021). The four characteristics of transformational leadership theory outlined by Bass were (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration (Bass, 1985). A transformational leader can achieve remarkable success through inspired followers using these four characteristics (Bass, 1997; Huynh, 2021; Nawaz et al., 2023). Followers may respond differently to leaders. A transformational leader could leverage aspects of one or more of the four characteristics in different scenarios and with different employees.

Idealized Influence. A leader cannot be successful without the ability to influence followers, especially a transformational leader. Idealized influence, also called charismatic leadership, involves followers viewing leaders as role models to emulate (Easton & Steyn, 2022; Porter et al., 2023). Leaders display idealized influence by envisioning the future (Chua & Ayoko, 2021; Porter et al., 2023). Through idealized influence, the transformational leader can create an atmosphere of excitement and pride (Astuti et al., 2023; Gan & Voon, 2021). Michaud et al. (2024) found that transformational leadership led to individual empowerment more than authoritative or transactional leadership due to the individual feeling inspired by the leader. A keen sense of purpose exists among followers due to a transformational leader's idealized influence (Bass, 1985; Lisak & Sampaio, 2021). Some individuals may want to feel they are a part

of an organization and may lack motivation due to fear. Individuals who idealize a leader may be willing to set aside fear and uncertainty in order to follow that leader's vision.

Inspirational Motivation. Motivation levels can vary based on how motivated a person is after listening to a leader's goals and vision. Followers are motivated by the leaders' enthusiasm and commitment to goals (Bass, 1997; Easton & Steyn, 2022; Thompson et al., 2021). Transformational leaders convey expectations to followers directly and clearly (Astuti et al., 2023; Gan & Voon, 2021). A transformational leader is skilled at bringing followers together and promoting shared goals in multicultural settings (Lisak & Sampaio, 2021; Teetzen et al., 2022). Lopez-Zafra et al. (2022) found a direct correlation between transformational leadership theory and successful group dynamics, which can impact organizations dependent on group efforts and teaming to reach their goals. Similarly, van Dijk et al. (2021) found that a group will be collectively more motivated and focused when leadership adopts a transformational leadership theory approach. Individuals who attribute the situation's meaningfulness to leaders' inspirational motivation tend to be more dedicated (Bass, 1997; Donkor et al., 2022). Some employees may struggle with self-directed motivation and look to leaders to inspire them to perform. A sense of inspiration is all the motivation some individuals, individually or collectively, may need to follow a leader's direction and vision.

Intellectual Stimulation. Some people from all generations enjoy a challenge that makes them think and conquer obstacles. Leaders demonstrate the intellectual stimulation characteristic of transformational leadership theory by seeking ideas and differing points of view from followers (Astuti et al., 2023; Deng et al., 2023).

Transformational leaders listen to ideas without judgment or public criticism, inspiring individuals to follow the leader's vision (Gan & Voon, 2021). Some people want to be valued and may develop and maintain a positive attitude when leaders value individual opinions. Encouraged individuals will develop new work processes and goals (Bass, 1985; Jiatong et al., 2022; Salanova et al., 2022). Park et al. (2021) emphasized that transformational leadership attributes and individual engagement are strongly related. The basic need for employment may be insufficient to keep some millennial individuals engaged and productive. Individuals who are intellectually stimulated and supported by their leader may continue their employment and put more effort into achieving organizational goals.

Individualized Consideration. As individuals, people often may expect leaders to connect with them as a person, not a product or a line on a spreadsheet. Leaders adhere to the individualized consideration aspect of transformational leadership theory by focusing on the individual needs of followers (Lisak & Sampaio, 2021; Meng et al., 2022). Transformational leaders are cognizant of followers' needs and display concern related to the specific issues followers may have (Bass, 1998; Saira et al., 2021). While working in groups is common and can be successful, people might respond to a leader who takes the time to recognize individual efforts. Listening to individuals is a crucial aspect of individualized consideration, which nurtures a trusting relationship between the leader and follower (Chua & Ayoko, 2021; Easton & Steyn, 2022). Some workers may lack a meaningful connection to other aspects of their lives and seek employment for the

sense of belonging and connectivity it provides. Individuals will likely be more engaged in their jobs when they feel connected with leadership at some or all levels.

Summary: Conceptual Framework and Millennial Employees

The world is changing, as is the workplace, which may now contain different subsets of employees, such as those with different multicultural origins, genders, ages, and educational accomplishments. Transformational leadership is the preferred leadership style of millennials (Easton & Steyn, 2022). Bass (1998) explained how transformational leaders can inspire and motivate followers for the greater good of society, which is essential to millennials (Ibrahim et al., 2022; Reavis et al., 2021). Millennials desire genuine connections with their leaders and honest feedback (Bertsch et al., 2022). Valued and supported individuals are more committed to a company or organization (Galuska et al., 2023). If a retention issue exists among millennial employees, an employer might be remiss not to take notice and employ the transformational leadership style to the maximum extent possible to address an employee retention problem with millennial employees. Transformational leaders may benefit from an in-depth analysis of millennial employee preferences and characteristics to avoid or mitigate potential retention issues.

Business Problem Evidence

Impacts of Employee Retention Issues

Employee retention may be a business problem because the inability to retain employees can be costly due to potential expenses related to repeatedly recruiting, interviewing, onboarding, and training new employees. There has been a documented steady decline in employee tenure rates per the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2024 (BLS,

2024b). Twenty-five to thirty-four-year-old employees' median time with the same employer has dropped 10% (BLS). The median time that employees aged 35 to 44 spent with an employer dropped 11.5% during the same period (BLS). At the time of this BLS report, these two age ranges correlated with the millennial generation and validated their reputation for leaving jobs often that do not align with their personal and professional needs and desires. While not the sole predictor, decreased tenure rates can be associated with employee retention issues.

The rate at which employees seek new employment opportunities can affect an employee retention business problem. A Gallup poll conducted in May 2024 revealed that 50% of U.S. employees considered leaving their current employment (Tatel & Wigert, 2024). Narrowing down to millennials, Gallup reported that millennials left their job at a rate three times that of other generations (Adkins, 2023). According to Gallup, the impact on the United States economy is estimated at $30.5 billion annually (Adkins). Forty-four percent of the United States workforce in 2023 were millennials (BLS, 2024c), with 83% of millennials employed (BLS, 2024a). Company leaders should consider recognizing the potential negative impact on profit caused by expenses related to millennial employee retention issues. A leader may analyze the many aspects of millennial employees' job preferences and characteristics to ascertain how the tenets of transformational leadership theory may address any potential concerns with employee retention.

Millennials and Employee Retention

As a generation, millennial employees may share similar attitudes toward leaving jobs that do not meet their personal and professional needs. Millennials are often perceived as job-hoppers who tend to leave their jobs if dissatisfied with any aspect of their current employment (AbouAssi et al., 2021; Greenwell & Mansell, 2021). Job retention rates for millennials can increase in work environments with growth opportunities and worker-friendly working conditions (Hassan et al., 2024; Li et al., 2023). Lack of job satisfaction is a key reason millennial employees leave (Hassan et al., 2022). Conversely, an abundance of job satisfaction is a reason why millennial employees remain at a job (Hassan et al., 2023). Some unsatisfied millennial employees' propensity to leave employment could indicate that they look for reasons to stay with employers rather than looking for reasons to leave. Leaders could influence job satisfaction and, by extension, employee retention by examining millennial employees' commonly identified needs and taking appropriate action to address those needs.

Business Topic Scholarship

Millennials in the Workplace

Differing opinions on which birth years correlate to millennials exist. In the literature review, I identified the period from 1981 to 1996 as the most common range of years when millennials were born (Locke et al., 2022; Pertiwi & Prena, 2024; Strawser, 2021). Other authors opted for a twenty-year range from 1980 to 2000 (Becker et al., 2022; Brand et al., 2022; Kossyva et al., 2021). In the scholarly literature, very little difference existed between the earliest birth year of millennials, with the earliest birth

year being 1980 (Gendron et al., 2024) and the latest 1983 (Raišienė et al., 2021). Conversely, a more significant difference existed with the ending birth year of a millennial, ranging from 1994 (Gendron et al., 2024; Hill et al., 2024) to 2004 (Sesen & Donkor, 2023). Millennials' birth years generally span a twenty-year range, regardless of the start and end dates. Although Parry and Urwin (2021) suggest that categorizing people into generational cohorts based on their birth year to predict shared employment preferences is flawed, most authors in the literature review favored grouping generational cohorts based on the birth year. Researchers and leaders could benefit from examining millennials' preferences and behaviors in the workforce using the twenty-year birth range commonly seen in the literature.

Given the range in birth years of millennials discussed above, a substantial age difference may exist between millennials at the same worksite. The youngest professional millennials are likely recent traditional college graduates and workforce entrants; conversely, older millennials are now in their mid-40s and have been in the workforce for some time. In the United States, government statistics indicate that millennials comprised 44% of the workforce in 2023 (BLS, 2024c). With the percentage of millennials in the workforce only expected to climb because more baby boomers are retiring and more millennials are entering the workforce, employers face the challenge of adapting workforce dynamics to address the needs of the anticipated sizable future millennial population (Abbasi et al., 2024; Hassan et al., 2023; Shaw, 2024). A leader may benefit from considering the potential age gap between employees when analyzing millennials'

job preferences and characteristics. A discussion of the literature covering aspects of millennials in the workforce is presented below.

Millennials' Attitudes on Job Longevity and Stability

An organization could suffer productivity loss if it cannot maintain stable levels and duration of employee retention. Millennials have a reputation for leaving jobs when they are unhappy with any aspect of their job (AbouAssi et al., 2021; Greenwell & Mansell, 2021). Employee retention among millennials appears to be higher in organizations that provide growth opportunities and have more employee-centric work environments (Hassan et al., 2024; Li et al., 2023). Some millennial employees cite a lack of job satisfaction as a key reason for leaving employment (Hassan et al., 2022), and conversely, employees tend to stay with a job when they have high levels of job satisfaction (Hassan et al., 2023). Prasetyo et al. (2024) conducted a project that identified job satisfaction as the most highly rated factor influencing an employee's intent to leave. Yulianto et al. (2024) found a significant relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intention, confirming a project by Galuska et al. (2023) that showed reduced millennial employees' intent to leave when they perceived a healthy work environment. Leaders focusing on increasing job satisfaction may also enhance employee retention rates, particularly among their millennial employee cadre. Leaders would be remiss to focus only on this aspect of employee retention and should consider other potential millennial employee preferences.

Millennials' Desire for Work–Life Balance

The attitudes of some employees towards work may vary depending on several potential factors, including the amount of time away from home a job requires. Work–life balance has become a considerable concern for millennials (Galdames & Guihen, 2022; Masdupi et al., 2023; Nabawanuka & Ekmekcioglu, 2022), prompting the need for some companies to take action to address work–life balance concerns (Farhan, 2021; Nwachukwu et al., 2022). Work–life balance can mean different things to different people, but millennials look at flexible hours and schedules (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Spencer & Kalyvaki, 2023), remote work or telework opportunities (Çera et al., 2024; Elenov et al., 2024), time away from work for leisure or family-related activities (Erdoğdu & Watson, 2022), and reduced burdensome workload levels (Prasetyo et al., 2024) as key work–life balance concerns. Nguyen (2023) found that work–life balance had minimal impact on millennials' job commitment; however, authors widely discussed millennials' strong desire for work–life balance, with the consensus that work–life balance is a crucial employment consideration for millennials. Given millennials' observed emphasis on work–life balance, company leaders should build work–life balance considerations into managing employee expectations. Work–life balance is just one of millennials' work-related priorities that impact how long or if a millennial will remain at a job.

Millennials' Preferred Leadership Style

Leaders who demonstrate care and concern for their employees could increase the likelihood of successfully managing millennial employees. Millennials prefer leaders

who possess the transformational leadership style characteristics of promoting trust, inclusion, innovation, and loyalty (Nawaz et al., 2023; Thapa et al., 2024; Yudiatmaja et al., 2023). Unlike the prior generation, Generation X, which tends to prefer independence and is less likely to be loyal to a leader (Çera et al., 2024), millennials seek to build connections with their leaders (Camp et al., 2022). Due to the age differences between Generation X and millennial employees, managers from Generation X are more likely to be current leaders of millennial employees. Generation X managers may benefit from studying and implementing the central tenets of transformational leadership theory when managing millennial employees.

Transformational leadership theory has four distinct characteristics that may attract millennial employees. These attributes include idealized influence, accentuating leaders who inspire trust; inspirational motivation, highlighting leaders' ability to provide a vision that employees will follow; intellectual stimulation, empowering employees to identify process improvements; and individual consideration, emphasizing leaders' focus on individual needs and wants (Bass, 1997). Millennials seek out leaders they can trust and follow (Farhan, 2021), leaders who can inspire employees to do meaningful work (Porter et al., 2023), leaders who challenge them intellectually (Zhao et al., 2021), and leaders who take the time to recognize them as individuals (Elenov et al., 2024; Zhang & Zhao, 2021). Most of the literature examined indicated that millennial employees prefer a leadership style consistent with the principles of transformational leadership theory. With the increasing number of millennials in the workforce, company leaders wishing to increase work efforts and retain millennial employees should focus on establishing trust,

providing a clear vision for success, and giving opportunities for challenging work projects, all while taking the time to become familiar with employees on an individual basis. Achieving all four aspects of transformational leadership theory will likely take concerted effort and continual reflection and improvement; however, the time investment to study and emulate transformational leadership characteristics could pay dividends to millennial employee contentment, productivity, and retention.

Millennials Yearning for Feedback

Feedback from involved leaders could impact the job performance and retention of millennials. Millennials need constant feedback from supervisors and management (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Hurtienne et al., 2022). The desire for acknowledgment and feedback stems from their childhood when society focused on making them feel special (Sessoms-Penny et al., 2023). Millennials also grew up during a time when computers and digital technology were progressing rapidly, and they are accustomed to obtaining instant answers to questions by performing quick internet searches (Bertsch et al., 2022; Rattanapon et al., 2023). Lack of feedback may impact a millennial's decision to remain with a company (Galuska et al., 2023; Islam et al., 2022; Larasati & Wisesa, 2023). The need for instant and constant feedback among millennial employees is a recurring theme in the literature review. Millennials can be their own best advocates, holding high expectations from employers regarding the recurring, effective feedback they seek on their job performance. Job retention of some millennials could become more challenging for leaders if millennials' feedback needs are unmet, potentially emphasizing the need for prompt and direct feedback to increase the retention of millennial employees.

Millennials' Need for Buy-In to Meaningful Work

Employees may be more likely to continue their employment with an organization if they feel their work is making a positive impact in or beyond their community. Millennial employees prefer to work for an organization with integrity and a worthy mission (AbouAssi et al., 2021; Hassan et al., 2024; Janeska-Iliev & Kitanovikj, 2024). Meaningful work is closely tied to employee engagement, which in turn impacts employee retention (Jena & Nayak, 2024; Kossyva et al., 2021; Larasati & Wisesa, 2023). Mahmoud et al. (2021) found that meaningful relationships at work bring a sense of accomplishment, even if they are not tied to compensation. Performing meaningful work gives millennials autonomy in their work efforts (Spencer & Kalyvaki, 2023). Another positive association with meaningful work is job crafting by employees, allowing them to modify their work efforts to more meaningful endeavors while retaining their employment status (Sesen & Donkor, 2023). Conversely, if access to meaningful work is lacking, there might be an associated increase in cyberloafing, which is when employees' lack of connection to a company's mission causes them to be distracted and not focused on work-related activities while at work (Chavan et al., 2022; Usman et al., 2021). Millennial employees' job engagement with meaningful work opportunities could be critical for productivity and retention. Meaningful work can mean different things to different people because some millennials' views on it can vary from narrowly focused to significant societal issues.

Some millennial employees might consider prolonged employment with companies they perceive as making a difference. The increased emphasis in higher

education and social media on CSR has influenced millennials' approach to seeking employment, considering a firm's CSR reputation as well as their consumer activity (Chatzopoulou & de Kiewiet, 2021; Reavis et al., 2021). Chatzopoulou and de Kiewiet (2021) found in their project that millennials, as consumers, are very concerned with CSR. Although still a consideration, price is not a limiting factor in millennials' purchasing decisions, which can be negatively impacted by a company's CSR-related behaviors (Chatzopoulou & de Kiewiet, 2021). Millennials' consumer decisions based on a company's CSR approach may lead to future issues as they continue to progress into leadership positions in their place of employment, because their leadership decisions may impact company performance and stakeholder satisfaction (Reavis et al., 2021). When discussing meaningful work in the literature, most authors have focused on millennial employment; however, a few have also focused on millennials as consumers, tying their consumer activity to their occupational pursuits. As millennials age, their desire to buy and work for ethical companies with solid CSR reputations may change the face of business as we know it. Some millennials' work preferences concerning CSR could change as they age, making CSR an essential aspect of the many issues surrounding millennial job retention.

Millennials' Partiality for Teamwork and a Teaming Environment

Some employees may prefer working in groups to reach joint decisions. Unlike Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980, immediately preceding millennials), who tend to prefer working independently (Bertsch et al., 2022), millennials prefer working in groups (Porter et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2021). Millennials seek fun, interactive group

work environments (Farhan, 2021; Hassan et al., 2024) and quickly become bored, looking for new challenges (Masdupi et al., 2023). Leaders who promote a teaming environment can reduce millennial employee retention issues (Abbasi et al., 2024; Galuska et al., 2023) because the collaboration involved in teamwork inspires millennials (Camp et al., 2022; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Millennials prefer the collaboration and open sharing of ideas and knowledge that working in groups provides (Elenov et al., 2024; Spencer & Kalyvaki, 2023). Many authors in the literature review suggested that leaders capitalize on available collaborative teamwork opportunities to increase millennial retention rates. Leaders providing teaming opportunities could increase a leader's ability to retain millennial employees.

Millennials' Pursuit of Continuous Learning and Growth

Leaders who provide educational opportunities can inspire employees to continue their employment with the organization. Millennials have never known a time without instant access to information on the Internet (Elenov et al., 2024). They are accustomed to having information literally at their fingertips and have a natural curiosity and desire to learn (Booysen & Malan, 2024; Van Rossem, 2021). Therefore, millennials expect quick responses to any questions they may have (Greenwell & Mansell, 2021). Leaders need to ensure millennials are challenged and continue to learn and develop in their jobs (Abbasi et al., 2024; Shaw, 2024), mainly because millennials are committed to lifelong learning (Çera et al., 2024; Janeska-Iliev & Kitanovikj, 2024). Millennials' emphasis on learning and tendency to leverage all available resources, including the Internet and colleagues, could be leveraged to increase retention rates. Leaders could consider providing

employee learning opportunities to ensure the continued learning and retention of millennial employees.

Millennials' Ideal Mentoring Opportunities

Some millennials may actively seek out mentoring opportunities because they value interaction with leadership. Mentoring can address aspects of a career beyond technical performance (Booysen & Malan, 2024). Jung et al. (2021) found that job insecurity plays a moderating role in employee turnover and suggested using mentoring to convey lessons learned from prior job insecurity challenges, thereby lessening millennials' concerns about job insecurity. Jung's findings were consistent with those of S. Park and Park (2024), who concluded that organization leaders should employ mentoring programs to address the concerns of millennial employees. A leader who takes the time to share their knowledge and experience with employees could improve their positive feelings about working for the organization. Organizational leaders could leverage millennials' desire for guidance from leaders by establishing mentoring and coaching programs to help retain millennial employees.

Millennials' Views on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Many millennial employees are motivated to work and learn in diverse environments. Millennials seek employment opportunities with companies that value and promote diversity and inclusion (Booysen & Malan, 2024; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Millennials are known to care about others (Bertsch et al., 2022). The world is becoming increasingly diverse, but accepting that a company will benefit from a diverse workforce without establishing a culture of inclusion is insufficient (Pichler et al., 2021). Leaders

must continually assess and address diversity and inclusion to retain millennial employees (Becker et al., 2022; Sessoms-Penny et al., 2023). Maintaining a diverse workforce brings different and innovative ideas to a workplace, because people with diverse backgrounds can contribute their unique experiences to work discussions, thereby avoiding tunnel vision (Shaw, 2024). Diversity and inclusion have gained more focus in the workplace, which many millennials support and encourage (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Millennials have demonstrated a tendency to quickly leave organizations that contradict their beliefs and values, particularly in terms of diversity and inclusion. Today's leaders may want to consider the propensity of millennial employees to leave organizations, among other job preferences, when examining retention issues.

Millennials' Inclination for Modern Technology and Innovation

Many millennials have grown up as technology has developed and evolved. Technological advancements and developments have impacted millennials' beliefs, actions, and accomplishments (Alam & Kuppusamy, 2024; Vaida, 2024). Some millennials are technologically proficient and comfortable tackling any task using technology (Astuti et al., 2023; Çera et al., 2024; Elenov et al., 2024). Additionally, many millennial employees expect access to the best technological resources available (Keith et al., 2021) and utilize technology extensively for communication (Bertsch et al., 2022; Vaida, 2024). Along with the emphasis on technology, millennials are more drawn to organizations that prioritize innovative work efforts (Abbasi et al., 2024; Elenov et al., 2024). The consensus in the literature is that millennial employees are more likely to remain employed with organizations that leverage technology and advocate innovation.

Leaders could increase retention rates by ensuring employee access to modern and easily accessible computer systems, among other millennial job preferences.

Millennials' Craving for Autonomy

Some millennial employees prefer to work independently and have control over their work parameters. Millennials strongly need autonomy and reject attempts to control or micromanage their work efforts (Spencer & Kalyvaki, 2023; Zhao et al., 2021). Ryan and Cross (2024) conducted a survey in which they asked millennials to prioritize their workplace needs. The respondents identified discretion in executing tasks as the second-highest priority, only being outdone by their desire to feel valued in the workplace. Leaders who permit millennial employees to control work tasks empower them to demonstrate their ability to complete assigned tasks (Zhang & Zhao, 2021). Millennial employees need a sense of independence and autonomy to fully embrace and excel in the workplace (Elenov et al., 2024). Managers of millennials may want to consider avoiding micromanaging tendencies. Organizational leaders who trust and empower their employees to complete tasks independently may benefit from increased millennial job retention rates.

Summary

As delineated above, the extensive literature review regarding millennials focused on workplace attributes and preferences. The majority of research highlighted millennial characteristics in developed countries. Prakash and Tiwari (2021) point out a gap in the literature regarding the abundance of research on generational similarities and differences in developed countries, while not addressing third-world developing countries.

Nevertheless, with millennials' ages correlating with the traditional, most extensive employee base in the workplace and millennials aging into leadership positions, company leaders could review the existing literature on millennials in the workplace to increase the likelihood of retaining their millennial employees.

Transition

In Section 2, I synthesize the professional and academic literature on the conceptual framework of transformational leadership theory, millennials' workplace preferences, and the characteristics of millennial employees that may impact their retention. In Section 3, I focus on the characteristics of my project, including project ethics, the nature of the project, data collection and analytics, and reliability and validity considerations. In Section 4, I present the findings and implications for present and future business leaders, social change, and future research endeavors.

Section 3: Research Project Methodology

In Section 3, I provide my project's research design and methodology and expand on the ethical considerations. Details of my project's population, sampling, and participants are covered. Also addressed in Section 3 are data collection, data organization, and data analysis techniques used to answer the research question.

Project Ethics

Researchers who take an ethical approach to their research will ensure the integrity of their project. The researcher is the most critical person in the project process and must assume the role of an unbiased listener (Yin, 2018). Therefore, as the sole researcher for my project, I respected the project ethics and fulfilled the role of an unbiased listener. I did not influence the participants' responses to the interview questions negatively or positively. Participants were the key to my project's success because there would not have been data to study and learn from without them. It is important to ensure the participants understand the business problem a researcher is investigating (Galvan & Pyrczak, 2023); therefore, I provided all participants with a thorough explanation of my project's intent and interview process. Researchers use concise communication with the participants to ensure clarity and understanding before they consent (Eeckhout et al., 2023). I explained the parameters of my project when presenting the participants with an informed consent form and allowed participants to withdraw without penalty. Also, I conducted the project honestly and ethically.

The researcher must take an ethical approach to their research efforts. Ethical research, focused on respecting people and doing right by them, aligns with the tenets of

The Belmont Report (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979). I took the necessary precautions to ensure an ethical and respectable approach to my project, including protecting participant confidentiality and transparency. I expected the free expression of participants' views to gain as much insight as possible and address the research question. The Walden University IRB reviewed my project to ensure I complied with ethical research standards. My final project documents included my IRB approval number (03-03-25-1053472). I utilized seven publicly available documents and a coding system to identify the documents, including D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D6, and D7.

Regarding interview participants, I took great care to protect their identities and confidentiality. Their identity will always be protected and not disclosed to others. I used a code name system to keep track of identities and prevent disclosure of identifying demographics, such as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, and P8. All interview transcripts will be kept in a locked safe for at least 5 years before being destroyed. No compensation was provided to participants; however, I sent personal notes expressing my gratitude. I ethically conducted my research.

Nature of the Project

I used qualitative methodology with a pragmatic inquiry design for my project. I used pragmatic inquiry principles to explore the experiences and knowledge of individual leaders and ascertain how these leaders implemented effective leadership strategies to retain millennial employees. When conducting business research, a researcher can leverage qualitative pragmatic inquiry to recognize strategies, lessons learned, and effective procedures to address business problems (Lim, 2024). Kelly and Cordeiro

(2020) highlighted three principles of pragmatic inquiry: (a) emphasis on actionable knowledge; (b) interconnectedness between experience, knowing, and acting; and (c) inquiry is an experiential process. Perspectives of business leaders from multiple industries can be analyzed using pragmatic inquiry rather than restricting the analysis and consideration of interview results to a specific industry. I leveraged the pragmatic inquiry structure's flexibilities when selecting and interviewing my project participants.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

Individuals with effective leadership strategies for retaining millennial employees comprised the target participant audience. The ideal supervisory experience of the participants was at least 5 years as a first-level supervisor. The participants' leadership experience aided in researching effective leadership strategies to ensure the retention of millennial employees. The targeted population was well-suited for this research because government labor statistics suggested that millennial employees tend to leave employment at higher rates than prior generations (BLS, 2024b). All participants' identities were protected.

I used homogeneous purposive sampling to select eight participants from the expressed population. Establishing appropriate criteria to select participants for a project is a key tenet of purposive sampling (Galvan & Pyrczak, 2023). The purpose, execution plan, and interview questions of my project were communicated to the participants to facilitate purposive sampling efforts. Participants are critical to a project's success and have the power in the interviewer–interviewee relationship (Lim, 2024). I addressed all

participants' questions and concerns. No interviews started until the participants understood my project's design and interview process.

Common professional associations and online business networking applications, such as LinkedIn, were the sources for participants. I used purposive sampling to select participants with the characteristics needed for my project. For instance, interviewing an individual without supervisory experience would not have yielded adequate data on leadership strategies to retain millennials. Smaller sample sizes can produce better data using semistructured interviews (Yin, 2018). I conducted semistructured interviews and reached data saturation quickly.

Data Collection Activities

I utilized a semistructured interview technique as the primary data collection method. By conducting interviews, I enabled leaders to share their views and experiences regarding the supervision of millennial employees. Researchers focus on the participants' responses and the data collected during the interviews, leaving data analysis for after the interviews (Yin, 2018). Therefore, I focused on the participants' responses during the interviews and did not think about how I would analyze them. Establishing rapport with interviewees is critical (Lim, 2024). Allowing participants to think and respond thoroughly is also essential, without influencing them with the researcher's bias (Adler, 2022). I remained open and attentive to participants' contributions, which put them at ease and resulted in solid interview responses. The researcher's conduct can positively or negatively impact a doctoral project (Adler, 2022; Lim, 2024). Therefore, I prepared for the interviews and maintained my objectivity while conducting them because the data

collected during the interviews was integral to my project. I used an interview protocol (see Appendix).

A researcher should do more than collect data to conduct a proper, unbiased research project. A researcher can leverage data triangulation to establish the validity of the research by using multiple sources of evidence to mitigate the risk of researcher bias (Lim, 2024). Denzin (1970) identified four types of triangulations: (a) data, (b) investigator, (c) theory, and (d) methodological. Denzin (1989) further refined the view of the four types of triangulations by relating data triangulation to people, time, and space; investigator triangulation to multiple eyes on the data; theory triangulation to using multiple strategies; and methodological triangulation to multiple data collection methods. Researchers cannot claim to have achieved data triangulation based only on having multiple data sources; a researcher must illustrate how the multiple evidence sources support the final analysis (Yin, 2018). I followed the methodological triangulation concept and used multiple sources to support my conclusions, ensuring the validity and reliability of my project. Additionally, I utilized publicly available records and documents, and member checking to supplement the primary data collection activity of interviewing to ensure my project's validity.

Interview Questions

I employed a semistructured interview technique for my project. The interview is the most critical data collection method of the multiple methods available to a researcher (Yin, 2018). Using semistructured interviews, researchers allow interviewees to share thoughts, recollections, and experiences (Lim, 2024). I conducted in-person interviews to

the maximum extent possible; however, virtual interviews did replace in-person interviews for three of the eight participants due to the geographical distance between us. The interview questions are listed below.

1. What challenges have you encountered with millennial workers, and how did you overcome them?
2. How did your leadership strategies impact millennial employee retention issues?
3. How have your leadership strategies affected millennial employee retention issues?
4. How did you measure the effectiveness of your leadership strategies on the retention rates of millennial workers?
5. How did your millennial workers embrace your strategies?
6. What beneficial guidance did you receive as a leader in dealing with millennial retention issues?
7. What advice would you give to new supervisors experiencing millennial retention issues?
8. What additional information would you like to provide regarding retaining millennial employees?

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

Researchers will likely benefit from an organized plan to analyze collected data. Researchers and scholars use thematic analysis to analyze interview responses to identify themes or disconnects related to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I used

Excel to organize the collected data, capture coding, and thematic analysis. I considered other commercial software, such as MAXQDA, NVivo, Relative Insight, and XM Discover. I used detailed data collection, coding, and thematic analysis to aid in data analysis. I explored coding results to identify common themes for my project. I analyzed the typical themes to identify effective and ineffective leadership strategies in managing millennial employees.

Researchers who leverage available electronic tools, such as transcription software, could improve the quality of their interview data, as using such software eliminates reliance on handwritten records, which may be subject to human error. Researchers can utilize transcripts as part of triangulation, which enhances the trustworthiness of the data analysis (Adler, 2022). I used the communication platform Zoom.com to audio-record and transcribe the interviews. I also used the commercial software GoTranscript to transcribe some of the interviews. GoTranscript provides human-based transcription services to provide reliable and clear transcripts. I reviewed all transcripts to ensure the Zoom.com and GoTranscript results were accurate. I considered other transcription software packages, such as Otter.AI and Trint. I conducted in-person interviews; however, given the flexibility of meeting virtually with anyone across the globe using electronic meeting software, virtual interviews with three of the eight participants occurred. I efficiently used electronic tools to conduct my project.

Reliability and Validity

Researchers can bolster the trustworthiness of their studies by focusing on actions that ensure the reliability and validity of their research efforts. Reliability and validity are

critical for any research project as they establish trustworthiness and academic rigor (Adler, 2022; Chetwynd, 2022). The reliability and validity of a research project become suspect if the data results are not deemed trustworthy (Adler, 2022). Reliability measures a project's consistency, while validity measures its truthfulness (Galvan & Pyrczak, 2023). Reliability and validity are intertwined and crucial in establishing a project's trustworthiness. As discussed below, I took appropriate measures to ensure the reliability and validity of my project.

Reliability

Researchers who establish studies that can consistently produce the same results demonstrate reliability. Reliable tests demonstrate the consistency with which the tests yield consistent results (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019). For instance, if a particular individual takes a test multiple times, the results should be consistent, establishing dependability and reliability. Scholars using multiple sources of evidence will establish research dependability and credibility (Lim, 2024). Researchers should emphasize organizing data in easily retrievable ways that establish a chain of evidence (Yin, 2018). A researcher should be leery of dependence on information from social media sites since such sites are highly unreliable (Yin, 2018). Transparency in the research design with all participants was my top priority and ensured my project's reliability. I focused on reliability and validity, as discussed in the next section, to ensure my project's trustworthiness.

Validity

Validity is a concern for researchers because it could illustrate the soundness of their research. Researchers use validity to focus on the test results' accuracy (Bougie &

Sekaran, 2019). Yin's construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability ensure the validity of a project's results (Yin, 2018). I allowed participants to review a verbatim interview transcript to verify the transcript's accuracy. By allowing participants to review their interview transcripts, the researcher enables them to indicate their approval of their inputs, thereby validating the thoroughness and validity of the interview data (Motulsky, 2021). Another process used to ensure the validity of a project is member-checking, which occurs when a researcher paraphrases the participant's response and asks the participant to verify if that is what they had intended to say (Motulsky). I used a two-pronged approach to illustrate the validity of my project. I provided transcripts to all participants for review and performed member-checking to ensure the validity of my project.

Transition

In Section 3, I review the characteristics of my project, including project ethics, the nature of the project, data collection and analytics, and reliability and validity considerations. In Section 4, I present the project findings and implications for present and future business leaders, social change, and further research endeavors.

Section 4: Findings and Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to investigate the effective leadership strategies employed by some business leaders to ensure higher retention rates among millennial employees, which may be necessary to sustain quality business decisions and improve organizational outcomes. In my qualitative project, I found four core themes during data analysis. The core themes were adaptive leadership approaches, employee relationship building, fostering growth and development, and employee engagement. I followed the thematic analysis approach of Braun and Clarke (2022). My project's findings may help business leaders across various industries motivate and retain millennial employees.

Presentation of the Findings

The specific business problem studied was that some business leaders lack effective leadership strategies to ensure higher retention rates among millennial employees, which are needed to sustain quality business decisions and improve organizational outcomes. The general research question was the following: What effective leadership strategies do business leaders use to ensure the retention of millennial employees, thereby sustaining quality business decisions and improving organizational outcomes? Publicly available documents from seven sources were used to develop the themes. Semistructured interviews with eight participants were conducted to collect data addressing the research question. Among the eight participants, five were female and three were male. Six were from Generation X, and one was from each of the remaining two generations: baby boomer and millennial. Four were first-level supervisors, meaning

they directly supervised employees. Two were second-level supervisors, meaning they supervised first-level supervisors and additional employees. Two were senior-level executives, meaning they led major divisions within their organizations (see Table 2).

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Generation	Role
P1	Female	Baby boomer	First-level supervisor
P2	Male	Generation X	Second-level supervisor
P3	Female	Generation X	First-level supervisor
P4	Male	Generation X	Second-level supervisor
P5	Female	Generation X	First-level supervisor
P6	Male	Millennial	First-level supervisor
P7	Female	Generation X	Senior executive
P8	Female	Generation X	Senior executive

Thematic data analysis, under the lens of transformational leadership theory, was leveraged to identify common themes among the project participants. The four core themes identified to address the research question were adaptive leadership approaches, employee relationship building, fostering growth and development, and employee engagement. These themes were identified in the collected data and align with Section 2 (see Table 3).

Table 3

Summary of Data Analysis Themes

Theme	*n* of participants who contributed to the theme (*N* = 8)	*n* of excerpts from data assigned to the theme
Adaptive leadership approaches	8	134
Employee relationship building	8	132
Fostering growth and development	8	112
Employee engagement	8	110

Theme 1: Adaptive Leadership Approaches

Adaptive leadership approaches emerged from data analysis for business leaders to address the retention rates of millennial employees, which ranged from a specific focus on individual employees to long-term organization-wide reoptimization efforts. A leader with a vision for the future could combine the idealized influence and inspirational motivation tenets of transformational leadership theory to relay that vision, thereby inspiring employees to follow the leader's vision (Chua & Ayoko, 2021). Examining the data through the lens of transformational leadership theory, I identified several key points made by participants to substantiate the need for business leaders to maintain a proactive and effective transformational leadership mindset to improve millennial employee retention rates. For instance, P2 emphasized that leaders must operate with the knowledge that millennials will represent a large percentage of the future workforce and that leaders must be able to adapt to retain them. P7 advocated for a leader to have a vision for the future and recognize that millennials are the replacements for older workers. When

speaking about a promising millennial employee with an opportunity for a senior leader development program, which would entail the employee leaving the current work assignment and leaving a void in current operations, P7 stated

> we got to release him and let him spread his wings if that opportunity comes, because that will help him become one of the senior leaders. Holding him back does not do that, even though it might hurt us if we're looking at it from that small lens. We as leaders can't do that.

A leadership mindset that enables a leader to envision the future and motivate employees by focusing on the future aligns with the idealized influence of the transformational leadership theory (Chua & Ayoko, 2021; Porter et al., 2023). Recognizing the need to develop employees was one of several insights expressed by participants regarding the adaptive leadership approaches theme.

Communication preferences of millennial employees were additional components of the adaptive leadership approaches theme that emerged from the participant interviews. Millennials prefer to communicate in a flexible and informal manner rather than a more structured hierarchy (Magni & Manzoni, 2020). The individual consideration tenet of the transformational leadership theory addresses the need for a leader to consider and respect unique employee work preferences, such as communication style (Setiadi et al., 2024). Several participants in the current study mentioned millennial employees' preferred communication style and methods to address those preferences. P3 expressed frustration that the biggest challenge they faced with millennial employees was their reluctance to engage with customers over the phone. P3 stated they will wait for

electronic responses and not reach out to a customer via telephone. P4 agreed that millennial employee communication challenges exist and emphasized that millennial employees have outstanding technological skills but lack interpersonal skills. Millennials grew up with technology and are comfortable using all features on smartphones, with a preference for text (Germaine et al., 2021). P2, a Generation X member, recognized the communication preferences of millennial employees, which differed from those of Generation X, but advised leaders to recognize those generational differences and make an effort to adapt to the current environment to improve retention rates of millennial employees. P2 also encouraged leaders to challenge upper management if any resistance to adapting to millennial employee preferences is encountered, which aligns with the individualized consideration tenet of the transformational leadership theory. In 2023, approximately 44% of the U.S. workforce was in the millennial generation age range and was expected to increase each year (BLS, 2024a). With millennials representing such a large percentage of the workforce, leaders should not minimize the importance of adapting work processes to fit millennial employee communication preferences where feasible. Recognizing millennial employee preferences alone will likely not assist a leader in retaining employees; therefore, leaders might benefit from comprehensive training in transformational leadership theory.

A recurring commentary from a majority of participants and a vital component of the adaptive leadership approaches theme was the lack of consistent, formal leadership training regarding generational differences received by the participants across the board. Setiadi et al. (2024) concluded that organizations should develop leaders who can display

transformational leadership qualities to improve employee engagement. The lack of training on these generational differences hampers leaders' abilities to develop the skills necessary to implement the individual consideration aspects of transformational leadership theory (Fadilla & Yuniawan, 2024). The participants touched on many different generational differences, but only a few are highlighted below. Lee et al. (2025) found that there are potential impacts on millennial employees' turnover rates attributable to millennial employees' negative views of prior generations' tendency to prioritize job commitment over commitment to home life. Publicly available documents from the BLS (D5 and D6) support the observed impact of millennial employee turnover rates. BLS statistics show the overall median number of years of current time with an employer has been steadily decreasing from 4.1 years in January 2022 to 3.9 years in 2024, which BLS attributes to the number of millennial employees in the workforce increasing while the number of baby boomers retiring continues to increase (BLS, 2024b). For employees aged 25-34 in January 2024, the majority of whom are classified as millennials, their median time with an employer was 2.7 years, while for employees aged 65 and over, the majority of whom are classified as baby boomers, it was 9.8 years (BLS). The stark difference in median time with employers between these two generations illustrates a difference in how each generation views loyalty and longevity to employers. Leadership training on identifying and reacting to generational differences can help reduce millennial employee turnover rates.

To maximize potential employee performance, leaders may benefit from training to recognize that the technical abilities and preferences can vary significantly among

employees of different generations and react accordingly. For example, one generational difference that a leader should be aware of is that millennial employees are much more technologically proficient than previous generations (Silva et al., 2024). Their mastery of technology leads millennials to prefer texting, while Generation X prefers email, and baby boomers prefer face-to-face or telephone conversations (Germaine et al., 2021). One aspect of transformational leadership theory that can be applied to managing different technological capabilities of members of different generations is individual consideration, since this principle of the transformational leadership theory impels a leader to recognize and appreciate different employee capabilities, interests, or preferences to ensure adequate employee performance (Setiadi et al., 2024). Five of the eight participants indicated a lack of supervisory training focused on generational differences, while two (P5 and P7) indicated receipt of some generational differences training. However, P5 indicated that the supervisory training received on generational differences occurred years ago and that the refresher supervisory training recently received did not focus on generational differences. Similarly, P7's estimated date of generational training was 15 years ago and did not focus on millennials, which is understandable since the oldest of millennials would have likely been newer entrants to the workforce and a smaller percentage of the workforce. Although some generational differences training had been provided to the participants, the training was not consistent, recent, or explicitly focused on the differences between millennial employees and previous generations. To grow more effective and adaptive leaders, organizational management should increase efforts

to provide training on generational differences, emphasizing the individualized consideration aspect of transformational leadership theory, to all levels of supervision.

Theme 2: Employee Relationship Building

The second theme to emerge from my project's interviews, I have collectively coined as employee relationship building. The individualized consideration tenet of the transformational leadership theory resonates with the employee relationship building theme since transformational leaders pay attention to employees' concerns and express empathy regarding those concerns (Bass, 1998; Ferdinan et al., 2025; Saira et al., 2021). Lopez-Zafra et al. (2022) substantiated the impact of transformational leaders' empathy on employee performance and engagement. P5 agreed with the impact of an empathetic leader on millennial employee retention and stated

it's always good to actually get to know your folks and understand what their personal interests are because understanding that helps you understand what makes that particular person tick, what they like or don't like, or what motivates them or is a negative motivator.

P7 also focused on listening to employees and discovering what drives them to excel at work. All eight participants advocated for the characteristics of individualized consideration of the transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes showing concern and empathy towards employee needs and is one of many aspects of the employee relationship building theme.

Showing genuine interest in an employee and building a sense of trust and security can motivate an employee to remain at an organization. Millennials, in

particular, strive to establish solid relationships with their leaders (Chua & Ayoko, 2021; Easton & Steyn, 2022). Lee et al. (2024) found that leaders who employ transformational leadership theory characteristics to establish trust with employees are more successful in motivating employees to perform, because the trust that employees feel in their leader motivates them to put forth their maximum effort at work. Project participants employed adaptive leadership strategies to foster strong employee relationships, including connecting with employees, understanding their motivations, and learning about their goals to help them achieve those objectives. P6 emphasized the importance of an employee's family by stating,

> when you show an interest in someone, maybe show that you care about their career progression and show you care about their family and what's going on in their life, it's more than just a transaction. So when I can, I am that person to whom that individual can confide.

Gull et al. (2023) also emphasized the importance of an employee's family by investigating work-family conflicts, identifying those as work issues causing family problems, and family-work conflicts, identifying those as family issues causing work problems, concluding that leaders cannot ignore either work-family conflicts or family-work conflicts in addressing employee turnover intentions. Leaders should embody the individualized consideration tenet of the transformational leadership theory and consider the importance of understanding employee motivations and how those motivations impact their work efforts and retention. Establishing a work environment of trust is another aspect of employee relationship building.

Millennial employees want to establish genuine relationships with their leaders. Millennials prefer leaders who possess the transformational leadership characteristic of idealized influence, which accentuates leaders who inspire trust and inclusion from their employees (Nawaz et al., 2023; Thapa et al., 2024; Yudiatmaja et al., 2023). Millennials strive to establish authentic connections with their leaders (Camp et al., 2022) and are more likely than the preceding generation, Generation X, to be loyal to a leader (Çera et al., 2024). Seven of the eight project participants echoed the need to illustrate characteristics consistent with idealized influence, such as being open, flexible, genuine, and trustworthy. P1 offered one adaptive leadership strategy aimed at building trust with millennial employees by stating, you need to be humble with them. I tell my people that I make mistakes, too, and some of the greatest lessons I have learned are from my mistakes. P8 provided a viewpoint of being open and honest so that millennial employees can see some of the thought processes behind leadership decisions. P8 emphasized the need for effective leaders to be as transparent as possible. The majority of participants also emphasized the importance of flexibility, noting that millennials want leaders who provide reminders and trust them to manage some or most of their work processes. The participants' views on employee relationship building and establishing trust with employees were supported by publicly available documents (D1 and D7), such as a memorandum from the United States Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Acting Director, which mandated supervisors to establish transparent and supportive work environments for employees (Ezell, 2025). Business leaders who embody the tenets of transformational leadership theory and make an effort to build trusting relationships with

their millennial employees can likely have a positive impact on employee well-being and retention.

Theme 3: Fostering Growth and Development

The third theme derived from the data collected revolved around millennials' desire for mentoring, coaching, and feedback opportunities from their leadership and is collectively referred to as fostering growth and development. Mentoring and coaching, while similar, are two distinct leadership skills that should be taught to supervisors in company leadership development efforts (Park & Park, 2024). Successful mentoring or coaching involves a leader taking an interest in individual employee concerns, which is a characteristic of the transformational leadership theory that has a mitigating effect on employee self-efficacy (Nasrulloh et al., 2025). Since millennial employees tend to seek out mentoring and coaching opportunities, business leaders should pursue any potential mentoring or coaching opportunities.

Mentoring and coaching could be beneficial in reducing job insecurity. A correlation exists between job insecurity and employee turnover (Jung et al., 2021). Fadilla and Yuniawan (2024) uncovered that organizations with supportive leadership can make employees feel comfortable in their jobs, thereby increasing the probability that employees will remain at the organization. Coaching can influence millennials to stay with a company by addressing employee concerns about performance and stress management, increasing their desire to stay with that supportive company leadership (Minzlaff et al., 2025). P8 emphasized a strong focus on mentoring and coaching by relaying examples of where mentoring efforts successfully retained millennial employees.

The millennial employees P8 mentored were ready to move on to different opportunities until mentoring was provided to them, arming them with different perspectives on their issues and tools to address the issues causing them to want to leave the organization. Mentoring and coaching can take on many forms and can help retain millennial employees.

An opportunity for millennial employees to see company operations from a top-level perspective would be an ideal mentoring program and might open their eyes to more than their immediate job tasks. P7 felt that not as much emphasis was currently placed on mentoring programs and described a past effort for new employees to shadow senior leaders and actually get to experience some of those senior meetings and understand a day in the life. Whether it is coaching focused on specific skills and setting goals or mentoring focused on sharing knowledge and supporting career growth, the interaction between the millennial employee and the coach or mentor within an organization can help lessen job stress, increase employee awareness of themselves and the organization, and potentially increase retention rates. Mentoring and coaching are two of several leadership tools to consider in reducing millennial employee turnover.

Feedback differs from mentoring and coaching in that it is often focused on an employee's job performance; however, feedback can also be given to the leader by the employee. Millennials desire feedback and interaction with leadership (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Hurtienne et al., 2022). Leaders following the transformational leadership theory focus on understanding the needs and desires of individual employees (Elenov et al., 2024; Zhang & Zhao, 2021). Ferdinan et al. (2025) illustrated the critical importance

of an empathetic leader who focuses on the individual employee. P6 emphasized that millennials not only want to receive feedback, but they also want to give feedback to their managers. P5 has observed that millennials tend to seek feedback more frequently than other generations. P5 stated they like to get a little bit more feedback more often. In two ways, feedback on what they need to be doing, and also how well they're doing. P2 opined that if we give them the space to talk, a trusted space to talk, millennials will tell us what they really feel. Valuing the millennial employee's feedback was conveyed by several participants, along with advice from P6 to tailor the feedback to the individual. P1 emphasized that leaders should be gentle in their communication with millennial employees, which aligns with Ferdinan et al.'s (2025) findings that empathic communication when providing feedback may reduce employee intention to quit. The participants' views on fostering growth and development with employees were supported by publicly available documents (D2), such as a memorandum from the United States Office of Federal Procurement Policy Senior Advisor, which mandated federal agencies to provide growth and development programs to include leadership and soft skills training in an effort to retain employees (Harada, 2024). Developing the skills necessary to provide feedback to millennials in a positive manner and being willing to receive and listen to feedback from millennial employees can be effective leadership strategies to reduce employee turnover rates.

Theme 4: Employee Engagement

The fourth theme to emerge from the participant interviews was employee engagement and the various aspects of employment that can ensure employee

engagement and potentially increase the retention rates of millennial employees. Business leaders can play a key role in how engaged millennial employees are at their workplace through the four tenets of transformational leadership theory outlined by Bass, which were (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration (Bass, 1985). Project participants discussed several aspects of transformational leadership when examining the various employee engagement aspects outlined below. Setiadi et al. (2024) concluded from their research that an organization's leadership that develops supervisors who exhibit transformational leadership characteristics is more likely to retain employees. While millennial employees share some characteristics, they are very unique individuals with different definitions of employee engagement. Employees will react differently to transformational leadership theory tenets depending on the nature of their employee engagement concerns. Business leaders need to leverage as many aspects of the four tenets of transformational leadership theory as possible when monitoring and addressing the varied work parameters of millennial employees, which contribute to employee engagement and ultimately, employee retention.

When work efforts have value to millennial employees, they are more likely to be committed to their jobs. Millennials in particular are known for their desire and need to pursue meaningful work (Janeska-Iliev & Kitanovikj, 2024; Nabawanuka & Ekmekcioglu, 2022). Employees are motivated by meaningful work when they work for and receive encouragement and value from transformational leadership (Kamboj & Garg, 2025). Dewi and Ekowati (2025) confirmed previous research findings relating job

retention rates to an employee's beliefs that they were valued and accomplished meaningful work. P7 confirmed this view by stating, you have to connect with them. You have to find out what is important to them. P6 spoke vehemently about the need to explain the "why behind the buy" when discussing millennial employees in a company's procurement division and the importance of illustrating to millennials the value of their work and how it relates to the company's mission to garner their enthusiasm about their job. P2 and P8 both stressed the importance of ensuring their millennial employees saw the value to the customer of their work and the impact of their actions. Both of these participants were vocal about the need to get millennials to see things firsthand so they could internalize the value of their efforts rather than just being told about their impact. My project's participants confirmed the widely held belief that a company will retain millennial employees who see value in their work. Employee engagement encompasses more than just meaningful work. Other aspects also require a leader's due attention.

Work–life balance is a key aspect of employee engagement for millennial employees who want to ensure they have time for both a productive work life and an active and fulfilling home life. Millennials' desire for work–life balance has prompted business leaders to address work–life balance concerns (Farhan, 2021; Nwachukwu et al., 2022). Ratinet et al. (2025) stated that a more effective leader would follow the transformational leader model and allow employees to establish work practices to address their work–life balance issues. The relationship between work–life balance and intention to stay with an organization has been confirmed in recent studies (Ferdinan et al., 2025; Gull et al., 2023). Gull et al. (2023) emphasized the use of flexible work plans in

addressing the work–life balance needs of employees. Ferdinan et al. (2025) concluded that organization leaders can decrease employee turnover when they are empathetic to employee needs. P2 agreed with the perceived millennial employees' focus on work–life balance and stated they care about work–life balance to a real degree. So I can't just give them the work–life balance speech if they don't have the opportunity to utilize it in that space. We won't retain them. Several other participants noted the need to prioritize work–life balance among millennial employees, with only one (P6) mentioning that there have been fewer millennials leaving the organization due to work–life balance concerns, suggesting that work–life balance is of lower value these days. Despite P6's speculation about the decreasing value of work–life balance, the majority of the eight participants strongly felt the need to consider the work–life balance needs of millennial employees when discussing various aspects of employee engagement and retention, which is illustrative of the individualized consideration tenet of transformational leadership theory. Work–life balance has garnered much attention, but it is just one aspect of employee engagement that leaders should consider.

Millennial employees want to enjoy their work environment, such as working in groups, and are more likely to be engaged in their job when they enjoy the work setting. Millennials seek exciting, interactive group work environments (Farhan, 2021; Hassan et al., 2024) and can become disengaged if not presented with new challenges (Masdupi et al., 2023). Ratinet et al. (2025) concluded that business leaders who follow transformational leadership tenets can positively impact team reflexivity and productivity by focusing on providing opportunities for collaboration to employees. P8 discussed the

importance of establishing a teaming environment and the role it can play in employee engagement and retention by stating

> you can create an environment where everybody feels like their voice is heard, in that they're a part of a team. So, they want to come into work every day. They don't just want to punch a clock, and they don't want to job hop.

P4 viewed group work slightly differently than the majority of participants and pointed out that, in P4's experience, millennials do not just want to be part of a group, but rather to be part of an elite team where team members excel. P4 stated

> I think they still appreciate the fact that they're part of something that may be more exclusive, that, you know, people are going to be removed if they don't do a good job, and so they value doing a good job.

Both P8 and P4 made excellent points, emphasizing the importance of business leaders considering the collective appreciation of the millennial employee pool as part of a team effort, rather than individual assignments, when considering millennial employee retention.

Participant views on employee engagement and work–life balance were supported by publicly available documents (D3 and D4). For instance, the United States Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) produced a report for the President and Congress of the United States in 2024 in which the board emphasized the importance of employee engagement and the correlation between high employee engagement, strong working relationships between supervisors and employees, and employee retention (MSPB, 2024). According to Desilver (2025), the federal government is the largest single employer in

the United States; therefore, business leaders would be well advised to study and consider any practices that the federal government promotes for engaging and retaining employees.

Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice

My project's findings may help business leaders tackle the problems associated with high turnover rates. Employee retention can be a significant business problem because the inability to retain employees can be costly due to potential expenses related to repeatedly recruiting, interviewing, onboarding, and training new employees. There has been a documented steady decline in employee tenure rates, as reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2024b). The median time of twenty-five to thirty-four-year-old employees with the same employer has dropped by 10% (BLS). The median time that employees aged 35 to 44 spent with an employer dropped 11.5% during the same period (BLS). These two age ranges correlate with the millennial generation, validating their reputation for frequently leaving jobs that do not align with their personal and professional needs and desires. Decreased tenure rates can correlate with employee retention issues.

The project's findings may help reduce the financial impact of low millennial employee retention rates. A Gallup poll conducted in May 2024 revealed that 50% of U.S. employees considered leaving their current employment (Tatel & Wigert, 2024). Narrowing down to millennials, the Gallup poll results illustrated that millennials left their job at a rate three times that of other generations (Adkins, 2023). According to the 2023 Gallup poll results, the impact on the United States economy was estimated at $30.5

billion annually (Adkins). Business leaders can apply the effective leadership strategies identified in this project, which comprise these four themes: (a) adaptive leadership approaches, (b) employee relationship building, (c) fostering growth and development, and (d) employee engagement. Business leaders interviewed for this project identified potential leadership strategies that may help mitigate the extensive costs associated with millennial employee retention issues.

As a business leader, I would like to emphasize and expand upon several key actions discussed by the project participants. First, business leaders should consider studying and participating in subsequent supervisory refresher trainings to ensure they have a complete understanding and appreciation of the potential impact of the transformational leadership mindset on millennial employee retention. A transformational leader can achieve remarkable success by inspiring followers using these four key characteristics: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1997; Huynh, 2021; Nawaz et al., 2023). Several participants emphasized the importance of adopting a transformational leadership mindset when engaging with millennial employees; however, most did so without grasping the underlying theory of transformational leadership. While understanding that behaviors aligned with the transformational leadership theory are beneficial to millennial employee retention is commendable, effective leaders could impact the profitability and longevity of their company by learning and employing a transformational leadership approach to managing millennials. Business leaders should consider internalizing all four

tenets of transformational leadership theory and strive to incorporate those characteristics into their standard business leader modus operandi.

Second, business leaders could look beyond the immediate to get to know and understand their employees on an individual basis, in an effort to retain millennial employees. Regardless of their own generational cohort identity, leaders should avoid assuming that all millennial employees will have the same work ethic and values as they do or even as other millennial employees do. Millenial employee work preferences have many different components such as work–life balance (Abbasi et al., 2024; Galdames & Guihen, 2022), interactive leadership styles (Chua & Ayoko, 2021; Spencer & Kalyvaki, 2023), desire for instant feedback (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Galuska et al., 2023), need for meaningful work (Janeska-Iliev & Kitanovikj, 2024; Nabawanuka & Ekmekcioglu, 2022), working in teams (Hassan et al., 2024; Sesen & Donkor, 2023), opportunities for continuous learning (Booysen & Malan, 2024; Larasati & Wisesa, 2023), and capitalizing on mentoring availability (Jung et al., 2021; Rattanapon et al., 2023). Aggregating all these work preferences into one grouping and attempting to apply a "one-size-fits-all" approach to managing millennial employees is likely not the most effective leadership strategy a business leader should adopt. Millennials are independent and diverse, and business leaders should consider this when hoping to retain millennial employees.

Implications for Social Change

Job retention issues can have a cascading effect on societal issues, such as higher levels of unemployment that can lead to increased reliance on public assistance, lack of

stability in the home and consequently, the community, and increased levels of stress that can lead to mental health concerns or domestic violence. Park et al. (2021) found that leaders possessing transformational leadership attributes had a positive impact on employee engagement, which, in turn, increased employees' commitment to the organization. Millennial employees are less likely to leave the job if they feel a sense of commitment and feel valued by their leadership (AbouAssi et al., 2021; Greenwell & Mansell, 2021). If a millennial can retain employment, they may avoid relying on unemployment benefits and some societal issues associated with prolonged unemployment or reliance on public assistance. Therefore, leaders who implement the basic tenets of transformational leadership may keep employees engaged and wanting to stay with a company, which has enormous potential implications for social change, because that employee's attitude towards work will be seen and emulated by current and future employees; therefore, decreasing the possibility of those employees leaving with the company, becoming unemployed and relying on public assistance. Society could benefit from leaders adopting the transformational leadership theory and taking additional measures to retain millennial employees.

Recommendations for Further Research

This project focused on millennials as employees and explored effective strategies that leaders can use to ensure engaged and productive employees. However, a topic for further research that was not extensively addressed in the literature examined for this project was how millennial employees would approach leadership roles. The years from 1981 to 1996 are among the most common birth years for millennials (Locke et al., 2022;

Pertiwi & Prena, 2024; Strawser, 2021), placing the older age range of millennials currently in their mid-forties, some of whom have potentially worked for two decades. Millennials are likely to hold leadership positions or are on track to do so. More research is needed to examine how millennials will approach leadership roles, not only in relation to their job preferences and those of other millennials, but also in relation to older generations who are still active in the workforce.

Another area for further research concerns the differences between millennials and the next generation, commonly referred to as Generation Z, which spans the age range from 13 to 28, with some just entering the workforce while others have been working for several years. Generation Z was born after the Internet existed, while some millennials were already born and in school when it emerged (Thangavel et al., 2021). Millennials did live through rapid technological advancements, but not to the same extent as Generation Z, which has always known advanced technology such as smartphones, unlimited Internet connectivity, and a multitude of streaming services and social media platforms, making them more technologically proficient than millennials (Thangavel et al., 2021). As of August 2024, only 18% of the United States workforce was from Generation Z (Department of Labor, 2024). As this percentage increases, Generation Z will make its mark on the business world, and their employee preferences are likely to evolve. How to manage Generation Z's work preferences and their likely impact on productivity and profitability are recommended focus areas for continued leadership research.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative, pragmatic inquiry project was to identify and examine effective leadership strategies employed by some business leaders to ensure higher retention rates among millennial employees. I interviewed eight established business leaders to gain perspective on the issues surrounding millennial employee retention. My goal was to leverage the expertise of business professionals to identify ways business leaders can retain millennial employees, thereby helping to sustain quality business decisions and improve organizational outcomes.

As a result of my qualitative project, four core themes were identified: (a) adaptive leadership approaches, (b) employee relationship building, (c) fostering growth and development, and (d) employee engagement. Currently, in the United States, millennials comprise the most significant percentage of the workforce (BLS, 2024b). As outlined and discussed in this project, millennial preferences include work–life balance (Abbasi et al., 2024; Galdames & Guihen, 2022), interactive leadership styles (Chua & Ayoko, 2021; Spencer & Kalyvaki, 2023), desire for instant feedback (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Galuska et al., 2023), need for meaningful work (Janeska-Iliev & Kitanovikj, 2024; Nabawanuka & Ekmekcioglu, 2022), working in teams (Hassan et al., 2024; Sesen & Donkor, 2023), opportunities for continuous learning (Booysen & Malan, 2024; Larasati & Wisesa, 2023), and capitalizing on mentoring availability (Jung et al., 2021; Rattanapon et al., 2023). As a generation, millennials have a strong reputation for leaving a job quickly if any of the aforementioned work preferences are not satisfactorily met (AbouAssi et al., 2021; Greenwell & Mansell, 2021). Company leaders who rely on

millennial employees for successful operations may be ill-advised to ignore the work preferences of the currently largest segment of the United States workforce if they wish to retain these employees, which could help ensure the profitability and longevity of their company. My project leverages the insights of business professionals on millennial employees, focusing on transformational leadership theory, and can help business leaders across various industries motivate and retain millennial employees, thereby avoiding the costly impacts of high millennial employee turnover.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Primary Business Research Phenomenon Under Study and Overarching Research Question

The research project topic is *Effective Leadership Strategies for Retaining Millennial Employees.* The overarching research question is: *What effective leadership strategies do business leaders use to ensure the retention of* millennial *employees, thereby sustaining quality business decisions and improving organizational outcomes?*

Primary Research Goal to Achieve from This Interview

This interview explores leadership strategies to sustain the retention rates of millennial employees in your business enterprise.

Introduction

1. Thank you for participating in this project. Your participation in this educational project on retaining millennial employees is important. It will help better understand how to retain millennial employees, who are essential to the success of companies in numerous industries.

2. You will be interviewed along with several other leaders, providing adequate information for this research project. Before we delve into the specifics of the project, a few key points need to be reviewed.

3. Please note that your participation is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to answer any questions or need to stop the interview at any time, please feel free to interrupt.

4. The interview will be audiotaped, and notes will be taken with your permission. After the interview, a transcript of the audiotape and any notes will be provided, allowing you

to review them and make any necessary corrections, ensuring that we accurately capture your responses.

5. This project may be shared with faculty members and fellow doctoral students; in sharing, there will be no mention of your names. Pseudonyms such as P1, P2, and P3 will be used if any direct quotes are used. It might also be used in conferences and professional meetings.

6. The information you share is strictly confidential and will be safely stored for five years after the project's completion date. The collected data will then be destroyed.

7. Do you have any questions?

8. As you are aware, we have allocated approximately 60–90 minutes for this interview. Does that seem acceptable to you? We will not go beyond that time unless you wish to do so.

9. Is audiotaping still fine?

10. Ready to go?

11. Let us get started, then!

Interview Questions

1. What challenges have you encountered with millennial workers, and how did you overcome them?
2. How have your leadership strategies affected millennial employee retention issues?
3. How did you measure the effectiveness of your leadership strategies on the retention rates of millennial workers?
4. How did your millennial workers embrace your strategies?

5. What beneficial guidance did you receive as a leader in dealing with millennial retention issues?
6. What advice would you give to new supervisors experiencing millennial retention issues?
7. What additional information would you like to provide regarding retaining millennial employees?

Closing

1. Thank you very much for your time. The information you provided is valuable and will help complete the project.

2. If possible, may a follow-up interview be scheduled to review and discuss the audiotape transcript and the notes to ensure your responses were interpreted accurately? Would one week from today at 1 p.m. be okay for you? Transcripts and notes will be provided at least three days in advance to allow sufficient time for review and preparation.

3. Again, thank you very much for participating in my research project.