

TITLE	The Acronym Generations: Do They Admire the Same Leadership Characteristics?
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OBJECTIVE	The purpose of this study was to examine whether different generations admire the same leadership characteristics.

METHODOLOGY

The study participants are the Baby Boomer residents of the Spanish Main Yacht Club of Longboat Key, Florida (a condominium whose residents must be 55 years of age and older; N=142, including 87 from the “Silent” generation), and the Millennials of the senior class of Sarasota Military Academy in Sarasota, Florida (N=21) and the juniors and senior students in the Leadership class of Braden River High School in Bradenton, Florida (N=27). All respondents completed the Characteristics of an Admired Leader (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Fifty-four percent of the respondents were females.

KEY FINDINGS

Honest was rated as the most important leadership characteristic by Silents, Boomers, and Millennials. Four of the five top characteristics from the Kouzes-Posner findings are the same for the Silents and Boomers: Honest, Competent, Forward Looking, and Intelligent (including Dependable for Silents and Inspiring for Boomers). In addition to Honest and Inspiring for Millennials, the other top three leader characteristics were Dependable, Determined, and Broad-Minded. The most prominent differences between the Millennials and the Silents, Boomers, and Kouzes-Posner historical list are Forward Looking (ranked 19th), Competent (ranked 13th) and Dependable (ranked 2nd) and Determined (ranked 4th).

Chi-square tests show no statistical differences between 12 of the admired leadership characteristics selected by Boomers and Millennials: Broad-minded, Courage, Dependable, Fair-minded, Honest, Imaginative, Independent, Inspiring, Loyal, Mature, Self-controlled, and Straightforward. Significant statistical differences were found between the eight remaining characteristics.

Millennials admire Intelligent, Competent, and Forward Looking at rates significantly lower than Boomers. They favored the following characteristics more than Boomers: Caring, Determined, Supportive, Cooperative, and Ambitious.

Post-hoc analysis between Millennial males and females revealed some significant

differences in leadership characteristic preferences. For example, no sub-group rates Honesty higher than Millennial females (96%), and no sub group rates Honesty lower than Millennial males (70%). In addition to this significant difference were also differences females attaching more importance to cooperation and imagination than males, and dramatic less importance to courage (with 0% for females and 30% for males). Boomer males and females are relatively the same, with the exception of females admired Dependability significantly more than males (59% to 16%).

The author concludes:

Educators, leaders of organizations, human resource professionals, training departments, and other researchers may benefit from the findings of this study and may choose to alter curriculums and leadership training programs accordingly, at all levels and with all generations. However, there are cautions to be considered. Kohli (1996) reminds researchers to avoid drawing sweeping conclusions about leadership based on research of one generation, in one location, exposed to similar cultural influences. Raines (2003), Thiederman (2003), and Deal (2007) all warn against stereotyping of individuals based on generational studies. Barnett (2003) advises that people do not fit into tidy categories. Alsop (2008) reminds researchers of the difference between common attributes and those that are universal. At the same time, this study shows that aggregated data, such as the historical Kouzes and Posner (2007), is also problematic when applied to different individuals, generations, and genders (p. 96).