

Leading the New Generation: Understanding the Leadership Styles of a Millennial School Head

Angelica C. Mandap

Saint Louis College, City of San Fernando, La Union, Philippines

Corresponding author email: 14100099@slc-sflu.edu.ph

Dated Submitted: November 11, 2023

Date Revised: November 18, 2023

Date Accepted: November 20, 2023

Originality: 98%

Grammarly Score: 99%

Similarity: 2%

Recommendation citation:

Angelica C. Mandap. (2023). Leading the New Generation: Understanding the Leadership Styles of a Millennial School Head. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 1(3), 16-23. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10154522>



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ABSTRACT

As the older generation of school heads approaches retirement and exits the workforce, millennial school heads are quickly taking over. While existing studies attribute particular leadership styles to the older generational cohorts presently engaged in the workforce, there is a dearth of prior studies identifying the leadership styles employed by millennial school leaders. This qualitative and descriptive single-case study bridges that gap by exploring and analyzing the leadership styles of a millennial school head. The study employs in-depth interviews with a semi-structured guide to unravel the essential leadership styles crucial for tackling the challenges of school management. The purposively selected participant, a millennial school head currently managing a school, holding the position of Principal, and aged between 26 and 41 years old, becomes the focal point of analysis. The findings reveal four significant themes: transformational leadership style, servant leadership style, instructional leadership style, and authoritative leadership style. In conclusion, millennial school leaders intentionally adopted these leadership styles to tackle the challenges they encounter in overseeing educational institutions. The paper emphasizes implications for pedagogy and educational management while proposing potential avenues for future research.

Keywords: Case study; Challenges; Educational leadership; Generational; Millennial

Introduction

Keeping abreast with the newest trends in education could be necessary to improve and survive in stiff competition endlessly. In light of the contemporary educational landscape, marked by rapid global changes such as technological advancements, economic challenges, international competition, and the management of diverse workforces, it becomes imperative to underscore the significance of school leaders. Within this context of heightened expectations for educational provision in each country, school leaders play a critical role in navigating the challenges posed by these dynamic factors (Hodges et al., 2020).

Being a school manager is a pivotal role in promoting high-quality education. Effective leadership within the school environment necessitates fulfilling diverse responsibilities, and a leader should possess the necessary competencies and skills to attain predefined objectives (Tonich, 2021).

However, the intense competition for talent acquisition, the retirement of long-serving employees, shifts in work dynamics, and inadequate organizational procedures attribute to the shortage of leaders in workplaces for recognizing, choosing, and nurturing talent. With this, our workforce is cultivating a fresh wave of millennial leaders in educational institutions (Farhan, 2021).

Easton (2023) asserts that the workforce comprises different generations, encompassing the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y, also known as Millennials. The integration of millennial generation leaders into the workforce can influence workplace dynamics. At present, Millennials represent the largest generation

in today's workforce. According to Carroll (2023), millennials will make up 75% of the global workforce by 2025, taking on more and more leadership positions.

The millennial cohort, alternatively labeled as Generation Y, Echo Boomers, and Digital Natives, came into the world between 1981 and 1996. This demographic group came of age during a time marked by swift technological advancements, encompassing the introduction of mobile phones, the internet, electronic mail, digital imagery, and various other innovations (Badar & Lasthuizen, 2023). It is imperative to acknowledge that generational demarcations should be perceived not as fixed delineations but as flexible and permeable constructs. A diverse tapestry of experiences, values, and perspectives prevails within a generation, such as millennials.

Moreover, this generation values inclusive, collaborative, and committed leadership and prefers approachable leaders who lead by example with high integrity, ethics, and vision (Folarin, 2021). Despite possessing these attributes, millennial school leaders encounter difficulties navigating diversity and fostering collaboration within a dynamic workplace. Furthermore, examining the millennial school administrators' obstacles to elucidate their distinctive leadership styles is crucial, subsequently influencing organizational outcomes regarding heightened dedication, efficiency, and satisfaction (Brown et al., 2021).

This paper strongly argues that millennial school leaders are reshaping traditional leadership approaches due to their distinct values and expectations upon entering the workforce. It emphasizes the suggestion by Appelbaum et al. (2022) that forthcoming research should prioritize understanding generational diversity and its impact on team and organizational dynamics. Acknowledging the diverse working styles of different generations, millennial school leaders must proactively address potential conflicts and disharmony arising from generational differences to foster a positive work environment.

As the older generation of school leaders approaches retirement and departs from the workforce, a swift influx of millennial school leaders is evident. While existing studies delineate specific leadership styles attributed to the older generational cohorts currently engaged in the force, a noticeable gap exists in prior research concerning identifying leadership styles characterizing millennial school leaders. Hence, this qualitative descriptive single-case study aimed to explore and analyze the leadership styles of a millennial school head, which are essential in dealing with the challenges of managing a school.

Methodology

Selection of the participant

The researcher purposively selected a school head based on predetermined inclusion criteria: (1) currently managing a school; (2) possessing a Principal item / having qualified for the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH); and (3) aged between 26 and 41 years. The focal point of this case study is a millennial school head referred to as Principal GenY. Throughout the study, Principal GenY will be the designated term for the research participant. Principal GenY presently oversees the management of a small urban school.

Having completed the NQESH in 2016, Principal GenY promptly assumed the role of a school head with a Principal item. Principal GenY holds a master's degree in technological and vocational school management and a doctorate in technology education management.

Motivated by a wealth of work experience, community connections, and effective teaching and school management practices, Principal GenY consistently inspires educators and school administrators, irrespective of age or designated position. Principal GenY actively engages as a resource speaker in various Learning Action Cell (LAC) Sessions, Seminars, and Workshops addressing contemporary issues, challenges, trends, and innovations in 21st-century education. Recognized for being a supportive school manager, Principal GenY places significant value on fostering effective teacher-manager relationships as the cornerstone of a school organization's success. Consequently, Principal GenY has earned commendable awards, not only for personal development but also for the school's achievements.

Setting

This case study occurred in a tiny urban elementary school during the school year 2022-2023. The school, which has the pseudonym School Y, is one of the small schools that provides equitable and quality education between and among its 453 learners. The school, at Principal GenY, is currently managing 21 teachers who belong to different age groups and generations. Despite being undersized and having a diverse age group of teachers, School Y still manages to participate, engage in various activities, and receive outstanding achievements. Table 1 contains the age distribution of the teachers in School Y:

Table 1. Age distribution of the teachers in school y

Age Range	Frequency (f)
19-21	0
22-37	6

38-53	10
54-65	5
Total	21

Design of the Study

This study employed a qualitative research methodology, specifically adopting a descriptive single-case study design. The primary objective was to investigate and analyze the leadership styles of a millennial school head, emphasizing their significance in addressing the challenges associated with school management. Case studies use a comprehensive longitudinal examination of a single case or event (Hunziker & Blankenagel, 2021); hence, it is the most appropriate method. The researcher conducted the study during the first quarter of the School Year 2022-2023.

Data Sources

The researcher created a semi-structured interview guide using apriori coding to gather data for analysis. The interview guide comprises three primary questions that underwent validation by an education expert to ensure their validity and comprehensiveness in addressing the research question: What leadership styles do millennial school heads use to deal with the challenges of running a school?

The researcher acquired the data by recording a face-to-face interview audio. The interview occurred at the participant's most accessible and convenient time. Moreover, the researcher secured permission from the School Principal through a consent letter before conducting the interview. The researcher discussed the consent form within the process, which grants permission to take an audio recording and outlines how we will collect, interpret, and analyze the data.

The researcher personally conducted the data collection. The interview questions were posed in either English or Filipino based on the need for clarity of ideas, aiming to reduce any potential triviality in the interview process and foster a more profound rapport. After the interview, the gathered data were interpreted and analyzed for the conclusions and recommendations of the study. Table 2 presents a sample of the interview questions.

Table 2. Interview questions

Interview	Sample Questions
Interview 1	- Are there challenges you encounter in managing your school as a millennial school head? - What are these challenges? - What are the leadership styles you employ in managing your school? - How does being a millennial School Head provide future differences and benefits in a school organization?

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The primary objective of the data analysis using such a model was to look for patterns relating to the exploration of the dimensions of leadership styles of a millennial school head. In analyzing the data, the researcher observed the following processes: (1) creating codes from the analysis of the transcript, (2) combining codes into sub-themes, and (3) linking sub-themes into themes. The themes led to the creation of dimensions of leadership styles that addressed the research question. During the data analysis processes, the research participant actively engaged in member-checking and reading transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the intended responses.

Trustworthiness

This study used audio recordings converted into an intelligent verbatim transcript. To ensure credibility, the researcher returned the analyzed data to the research participant for member checking. Moreover, to establish the trustworthiness of the research findings, the researcher utilized peer debriefing as one of the methods. To address the concern of triangulation, the researcher engaged in cross-validation by conducting face-to-face interviews with specific colleagues associated with the data referenced by the research participant.

Results and Discussion

The study builds upon the initial data gathered about the leadership styles employed by a millennial school principal, which is essential for effectively addressing the challenges inherent in school administration. The interview process yielded the identification of four distinct themes of leadership styles: (1) transformational leadership, (2) servant

leadership, (3) instructional leadership, and (4) authoritative leadership. The subsequent discussion further expounds upon each diverse subtheme, revealing overarching themes.

Transformational Leadership Style

The data analysis revealed the emergence of the transformational leadership style as the first theme. This theme underscores the commitment and vision of a millennial school head toward instigating change. For instance, the research participant articulated the imperative for the school and its teachers to proactively embrace and adapt to the demands of contemporary society, thereby setting a goal for continuous improvement. The data implies that a millennial school head possesses a leadership style that mobilizes teachers to actively contribute to developing the educational mission and objectives. The millennial school head diligently strives to effect change and commit to achieving this objective. Principal GenY mentioned:

"I constantly push them to adapt because they have to deal with the shifting demands of the 21st-century educational system and the demands of time. They must also cope with the learners and, of course, with technology."

The researcher, being a teacher, recognizes that adapting to the needs of society ensures that education remains relevant. The statement conveys the proactive stance of a millennial school head in consistently urging educators to adapt to evolving challenges. It implies a commitment to preparing teachers to navigate the dynamic landscape of 21st-century education, encompassing changes in educational methodologies, learner dynamics, and technology integration. The millennial school head actively fosters a learning environment that aligns with contemporary demands, reflecting a proactive approach and ensuring educators and students are equipped to thrive in an ever-changing educational landscape.

The leadership of school leaders notably shapes the school's performance, teacher's effectiveness, and students' success. The results showed that the millennial school head had implemented changes for the benefit of the students in school through transformational leadership. A millennial transformational school head is not afraid of change and is prepared to take chances, alter long-standing practices, and motivate followers to reach and surpass their full potential. By encouraging opportunities for everyone to participate in the leadership process, these change agents lead with confidence and vision (Omilion-Hodges & Sugg, 2018).

Another transformational leadership style theme is creating a culture of innovation and improvement. As Principal GenY mentioned about teachers' hesitation to use technology in teaching, the research participant still motivates them to cope with the demands of society to improve and transform educational processes. As a millennial school leader, the emphasis rested not solely on enhancing the teaching-learning process but also on effecting comprehensive transformation within the school as an organization. This transformation provided a keenly felt gratification and pride, as we considered it an altruistic endeavor benefiting the students and the broader community (Batanero et al., 2021).

Dyhrkopp (2021) states that experienced teachers efficiently employ technology, regardless of variations in their prior experiences with technology. To optimize students' advantages in a technology-oriented learning setting, it is imperative for school leaders to actively support teachers, foster collaborative efforts among them, and exemplify positive teaching practices that incorporate technology effectively.

A corollary to the establishment of a culture fostering innovation and enhancement is the monitoring and managing of the emotions of others. This data means that as the school improves and advances its educational endeavors, a millennial school head still considers what others might feel about these changes. Principal GenY averred:

"They should not be pressured, and I am not giving them abrupt instructions."

Millennial school leaders positively impact teachers, elevating morale and performance by nurturing trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect. These leaders adeptly navigate and influence emotions through their charismatic and compassionate interactions, a phenomenon called 'the generation of feelings.' This capability enables them not only to regulate their own emotions but also to manage the emotions of others. Consequently, they effectively motivate their teams, foster success, and lead initiatives for innovation and change (Duraku & Hoxha, 2021).

Servant Leadership Style

The second identified theme is the manifestation of the servant leadership style. The theme denotes the inclination of a millennial school administrator to involve group members in the decision-making process. A leader employing this style maintains that heightened team morale increases team members' engagement. Three subthemes build up the servant leadership style. These subthemes include (1) guiding from a place of support and (2) sharing decision-making power.

In terms of guiding from a place of support, Principal GenY seeks to achieve a vision by consistently providing vital support to employees. Since the research participant handles a diverse workforce (See Table 1 for the Age Distribution of the Teachers in School Y), Principal GenY facilitates the work by providing continuous and smooth technical assistance. Principal GenY opined:

"When communicating with older teachers, I must do it step-by-step. For older teachers, it should be procedural. There should be phase 1 and phase 2."

Tenured teachers encounter challenges in adapting to new state standards. Embodying a millennial school leadership approach involves regular meetings with each teacher, providing personalized support to ensure their alignment with current standards. While this leadership style demands a substantial time commitment, it holds the potential for significant and enduring benefits. Competent school leaders guide struggling staff members by imparting the skills necessary for success, offering tailored feedback, and maintaining empathy toward educators' needs. Over time, these supportive measures can contribute to noticeable enhancements in job performance (Ismail et al., 2021).

Aside from guiding from a place of support, Principal GenY also considers power sharing in decision-making. The Principal GenY mentioned equal communication among the organization's members and respecting their opinions. Principal GenY averred:

Also, I have to communicate with their level. So, when it comes to young teachers, the usual way of communicating with the same age bracket. But, for seasoned teachers, it comes with high respect. When they have opinions, I have to respect them. I have to weigh if their comments or suggestions are better than mine because they are seasoned teachers already. But it's the same with the young ones; we have the same wavelength, but I also have to weigh the pros and cons if their suggestions are better.

According to Kaiser and Thompson (2021), millennial leaders inspire and convince their school community to realize their enduring vision by distributing decision-making authority. Servant leaders can enact structural modifications that align with broader objectives by involving teachers and students in envisioning the school's future. This finding illustrates that, over time, servant leadership contributes to cultivating a favorable and effective school environment.

Instructional Leadership Style

The data analysis revealed a notable theme concerning the instructional leadership style employed by millennial school leaders. This leadership approach encompasses addressing pedagogical challenges and assuming responsibility for the professional development of teachers. In an interview, Principal GenY emphasized the significance of enhancing instructional pedagogies and supporting the professional growth of teachers to attain institutional goals and objectives. This proactive stance is vital for meeting the evolving demands of 21st-century educational processes. As a teacher, the researcher believes that improving instructional pedagogies allows teachers to diversify their approaches, catering to various learning styles and ensuring that all students can succeed. Principal GenY shared:

I am very particular about the technology that we are using, so I am challenging them to use technology in their classroom teaching. As a millennial school head, when it comes to the use of technology, that is what we can provide to an organization, and it is beneficial because it makes school transactions and communications more accessible. Everything we do in school, we relate to technology.

Millennial school heads are well-versed in technology; they grew up with it. Technology has become essential to millennial life (Marston, 2019). As instructional leaders, millennial school heads employ technological strategies to oversee the teaching-learning process and administrative functions within their schools. The effective utilization of digital learning tools in classrooms can enhance student engagement, support educators in crafting improved lesson plans, and facilitate individualized instruction. Furthermore, these tools contribute to developing essential 21st-century skills among students (Dsals, 2022).

Taking on the responsibility for the professional development of teachers is an inherent consequence of addressing pedagogical challenges. This finding means that thriving in today's fast-changing world requires every teacher to engage in ongoing professional development actively. This active pursuit enables teachers to enhance their knowledge and skills, effectively transmitting 21st-century skills to their students. School administrators can actively support school programs and teachers in pursuing professional development to facilitate this endeavor. Principal GenY opined:

"If there are activities that can help the school and can help the teachers, either personal or professional development, then we must do it."

Teachers work best when they feel empowered. Millennial school leaders believe they can enhance the well-being of teachers and the organization by identifying avenues for refining policies and processes. This finding may encompass initiatives such as improving employee welfare, facilitating the teaching-learning processes, or offering increased opportunities for professional development (Fries, 2018).

Authoritative Leadership Style

Another theme of being a millennial school head is the authoritative leadership style—two constructs compose this theme. First is the quick and effective decision-making. Second is operating under strict policies and rules. According to the research participant, acting as quickly as possible is necessary in any given situation, and teachers must cope and adapt to it. Principal GenY mentioned:

"When it comes to governing the school, they must cope with me and how I manage it because I work quickly. If I have something that will benefit the school, I'll impose it."

Millennial school heads must prove themselves, demonstrating promptness in their management approach and addressing employee issues with agile decision-making. This tendency frequently fosters employee motivation and enhanced productivity (Knights, 2022). The advantage of this leadership approach is the ability of the leader to act quickly in times of chaos or crisis. Here, the team soon chooses solutions from the available alternatives, avoiding valuable time lost on pointless discussions and debates (Murniarti, 2019).

On the contrary, Post (2022) argued that millennials opt for collaborative leadership rather than an authoritative one. The imperative to foster relationships ranks among the core values embraced by millennials. Millennial leaders exhibit a preference for a team-oriented approach as opposed to an individualistic one in the pursuit of organizational goals and missions. Before crucial decision-making, millennial leaders habitually seek input and consultation from their teams.

Finally, part of the authoritative leadership is operating under strict rules and policies. This outcry seems rooted in the abovementioned component about quick and effective decisions. As situations arise, teachers exhibit reluctance in carrying out their assigned responsibilities, as conveyed by the research participant during the interview. With this, Principal GenY averred:

"When it comes to giving instructions, I still have to provide proof and pieces of evidence. There should be legal bases. Whenever I give them instructions, I should also attach DepEd orders mandated by the Department of Education so that they don't say that I will make them do what I want, so there must be a basis for what the teachers are asked to do."

To exercise their authority, millennial leaders must adhere to the higher-ups' guidelines and policies that will direct their knowledge, pursuits, and objectives. This leadership style addresses current problems and presupposes a sizeable educational gap between the board and the staff and the workers' material motivation (Schlegel, 2020).

Conclusion and Implications

This study enabled the identification and categorization of themes derived from the data, shedding light on the discernment of leadership styles exhibited by millennial school administrators. These identified leadership styles encompass (1) transformational leadership style, (2) servant leadership style, (3) instructional leadership style, and (4) authoritative leadership style. The themes depicted are not independent but somewhat intertwined. This interconnection facilitates a clear portrayal of the leadership styles employed by a millennial school leader in effectively addressing and managing challenges related to school issues.

The leadership styles exhibited by a millennial school head demonstrated a positive correlation with organizational outcomes and effective leadership behavior. The findings indicated that age does not exert an influence on organizational outcomes. Crucially, the leader's behavior and networking connections with employees are pivotal in guiding a dynamic workforce and accomplishing organizational goals. The implications of this study could contribute to fostering positive social change at individual, organizational, and societal levels.

Establishing a transformative, service-oriented, instructional, and authoritative learning and collaborative working environment may significantly influence cultivating a friendly and productive atmosphere. Leaders who adhere to these leadership styles have the potential to enhance the well-being of their surrounding community and construct an inviting, inclusive environment.

The findings outlined above justify adopting a next-generation leadership approach, urging current leaders to adopt a distinct strategy in the 21st century for their organizations' effective management and growth.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study depict the leadership styles of a millennial school head; however, one should exercise caution when generalizing based on this information. In light of the rural setting, researchers may investigate a counterpart to this study, which was limited to a single small school in an urban area.

Future researchers may consider conducting a similar study on larger schools and more participants involved. To further enrich the data, conduct a comparative study focusing on the differences between the leadership styles of a millennial school head and a traditional one.

Contributions of Authors

The author of this study is the sole contributor to the entire research process, including data collection, analysis, and the development of this work. The author and the Saint Louis College School of Advanced Studies have reviewed and approved the final version of the study.

Funding

This research project was conducted without direct financial support from any external funding agency or specific grant. The study was entirely self-funded by the researcher. All costs associated with data collection, analysis, and publication were personally covered. This funding arrangement underscores the independent and impartial nature of this research, ensuring that the findings and conclusions presented herein are free from any potential conflicts of interest or external influence. The researcher acknowledges their dedication and commitment to unbiased and rigorous scientific investigation, which remains a fundamental principle of this research endeavor.

Conflict of Interests

The author declare that there is no conflict of interest associated with this research study.

Acknowledgment

The researcher expresses gratitude to "Principal GenY" for sharing valuable insights and experiences as a millennial school head for this research. Additionally, the researcher extended appreciation to Dr. Constantino Narciso V. Sanchez by providing assistance and invaluable support to the researcher.

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