Cohabitation in Multigenerational Workplaces
Leader-Follower Relationships between Millennials and Baby Boomers

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“A Generation is not defined by the options it has but by the choices it makes”

Sharanya Haridas
Abstract

**Title:** Cohabitation in Multigenerational Workplaces - Leader-Follower Relationships between Millennials and Baby Boomers

Due to a demographic change in today’s society, it often occurs that people from different generations cohabitate in workplaces with each other. Due to this change, we observe a re-orientation of society and its beliefs and values, which affects not only organizations themselves, but also the work relationship between younger and older generations and explicitly the relationship between a leader and a follower. Generational diversity evolves, which can have a positive but also a negative impact on the workforce in organizations. The aim of this master thesis is to give an insight of how generations experience their leader-follower relationships in multigenerational workplaces, on the example of Millennials and Baby Boomers. For this purpose, a tendency to an inductive research approach was chosen. Firstly, a theoretical background is comprised, which includes a description of generations as well as leader-follower relationships. Secondly, a qualitative empirical study was pursued, with interview participants of the Millennial as well as Baby Boomer generation, in either leading or following positions. Based on the empirical data, nine areas of experience were discovered. These include open communication connected with honesty, work climate, mindset towards change, learning from each other, appreciating each other, respect, trust, intensity of relationship and preconceptions. The experiences of Millennials and Baby Boomers in leading as well as following positions can be categorised in these areas. The findings shall serve as a contribution for leaders as well as followers who cohabitate with each other in multigenerational workplaces. The study provides an insight of what Millennials and Baby Boomers value and expect in their workplace today, with the help of which a positive work climate can be ensured.

**Keywords**

Generations, Generational Diversity, Millennials, Baby Boomers, Cohabitation, Leader-Follower-Relationships, Work Relationship, Multigenerational Workplace
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Kalmar, 17.05.2018

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1 Introduction – What are we doing?

“As the vice president of a welfare organization, one of my responsibilities is it to recruit new team members. I am conducting job interviews on a regular basis and the applicants are Millennials as well as Baby Boomers. With Baby Boomers, it sometimes happens that they start questioning me during the interview, even though it is supposed to be the other way around. I often get questioned about what I have done before and I have to justify myself in front of the older applicants why I am in this position. It feels as, just because I am younger than them, I have to defend myself and earn my respect in interviews where I am the one who should have done the questioning. I have not seen that happening when my colleague from the Baby Boomer generation is doing the interviews.” (Alexander H, 2018, Interview Participant)

1.1 Background

This is a typical example of how fast conclusions about other generations can be drawn. In every area of our lives, we meet people from different generations and are confronted with generational diversity. How many times do we hear from grandparents how different everything is nowadays? How many times do we realise that someone from another generation does not understand what we are talking about, simply because they have never experienced it or seen it before? Several studies analyse how different generations live, work and interact with each other. In an article by Suitor and Pillemer (1988) it is analysed how different generations live together. Their findings describe that differences among parents and their children become less relevant with increasing age and the tolerance for differences increases. (Suitor & Pillemer, 1988) The topic of different generations is also mentioned when it comes to consumption and travel patterns of various generations (McDonald, 2015). As another example, Grob and Wolter (2007) study the interaction of different generations in the field of education. Additionally, Hess et al. (2017) focus on political preferences of different generations. Nancy Foner argues in her book (1984) that gaps between young and old can lead to structured inequalities, which can shape the quality of everyone’s life and interpersonal relations. She discusses the need for greater appreciation of these inequalities and resulting conflicts. (Foner, 1984)

Due to the global phenomenon of demographic change, the world is in a transition at the moment. Demographic change is a result of two global trends. On one hand the fertility is declining and on the other hand life expectancy is increasing. Therefore, in most countries
demographic aging is occurring, which means there is an increase of the median age of our population and the share of people above the age of 65 is growing. A reverse of the age pyramid is therefore expected over the next years. (Muenz, 2007)

A generation is described as a group of people who are born in a similar time span and therefore share a number of life occurrences with each other. Analysts argue that the joint life experiences can condition a group to have different beliefs and values than other ones, hence, a generational gap emerges. (White, 2011) Therefore, looking at the current generations of Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z, the following is described in literature:

- **Traditionalists:** The generation of Traditionalists includes people who are born before the year 1945. People born in that time experienced, for example, the Great Depression and the Second World War. Due to their experiences, researchers believe they have developed a strong work ethic, focus on loyalty and stability and see work as a privilege. (White, 2011)

- **Baby Boomers:** The Baby Boomer generation is, in the literature, often described as the generation which is born between the years 1946 and 1964 and has experienced, for instance, the Vietnam Era and the development of the TV. The Baby Boomer generation is often described as dedicated, optimistic and as the ones who have great knowledge and experience which they can contribute to a workplace. (White, 2011)

- **Generation X:** Mostly, Generation X includes people who were born between the years 1964 and 1980 and share experiences such as the Sesame Street, development of MTV and PCs and an increase in the divorce rate. This generation is believed to be very adaptable, independent and technology proficient. (White, 2011)

- **Millennials:** Millennials are often called Generation Y and, according to many researchers, this generation includes those who are born after the year 1980. They have among others experienced, for example, the development of social media and digital cameras. Furthermore, major life events include 9/11 and the experience of an increasing form of diversity. Millennials are supposed to be multi-taskers who have a global world view. (White, 2011)

- **Generation Z:** Generation Z, the youngest generation at the moment, is mostly considered to consist of the ones who are born after the year 2000. They are described as the mobile generation, who grew up with a high amount of technology such as mobile phones, the world wide web and social media platforms. People of this
generation are not yet participating in the labour market or have only been participants for a very short time. That might be one reason why Generation Z is the one generation which is often left out in current academic publications. (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015)

The comparison of various characteristics, which the different generations are believed to have, shows a shift in society what, as a result, also affects organisations and corporations. For example, Millennials have, in comparison to former generations, redefined their meaning of success in personal as well as in their professional life. (Brack & Kelly, 2012) Since several studies describe that values are influencing behaviour, different behaviour patterns can be expected from the variety of generations (Giacomino et al., 2011).

In many studies, these generational differences are described as causing problems among generations within communication, the use of technology and other areas which relate to different world views and perspectives on work-life balance (White, 2011). Literatures mostly describe tensions within these interactions (Urick et al., 2017). Especially in workplaces, the appearance of multi-generational employees has been established where three to four different generations interact sometimes very closely with each other (Amayah & Gedro, 2014). Nevertheless, some researchers also believe that tensions in these areas are only based on perceived differences between generations (Urick et al., 2017). Furthermore, some researchers argue that different generations might have more in common than it is usually expected (White, 2011).

1.2 The Authors

In order to understand why we chose the topic “Cohabitation in Multigenerational Workplaces” and why it is a relevant work for our future, we would like to shortly introduce ourselves as the authors of this thesis.

Anne Herzig and Jessica Treffler: We are two Germans in our late twenties, who studied our Bachelor in Germany, worked and travelled in Australia and the United States of America and then came to Sweden to do our Master in Leadership and Management in International Contexts at the Linnaeus University. We have different academic backgrounds before starting this Master’s program, but what we both share is the generation to which we belong. We have both experienced working with other generations previously and found that we have had positive as well as negative experiences in these work relationships. The experiences we have
made us curious about how others experience working with different generations. This is the reason why we are very interested in the work relationship between leaders and followers of different generations. We as Millennials, and potential leaders in the near future, are directly affected and involved in the thematic of this research issue. For our future career in possible leading positions, we see this thesis as a chance for us to expand our knowledge about our generation as well as other generations, the different or similar values, beliefs and expectations as well as get a better understanding how work relationships are experienced across generations.

We hope the short introduction about us as the authors of this thesis gave you an insight why the chosen topic is very close to our hearts.

1.3 Problem Discussion and Relevance of Study

Due to a demographic change in today’s society, Millennials will soon become the majority in workplaces. Not only have traditional paradigms decreased in importance within our society nowadays, we also observe a re-orientation of society and its beliefs and values. This shift affects not only organizations themselves, but also the work relationship between younger and older generations. This cycle issue has been repeated throughout history, however, in a world where demography is significantly shifting and generational diversity becomes greater in its dimension, the relevance of cohabitation in multigenerational workplaces increases. (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011) Due to fast paced shifts of traditions, work values and technological changes, this topic is more important than ever (Amayah & Gedro, 2014). Generational diversity is a widespread phenomenon across workplaces which affects organizational life in various forms. Several empirical studies suggest that work values appear to differ across generations, which can be mostly seen as a result of our societal environment. (Smola & Sutton, 2002) No wonder that the topic of generational differences in workplaces has been extremely popular among many academic publications (Lyons et al., 2015). There are a number of studies which discuss generational diversity in workplaces. Most of these studies focus on possible intergenerational conflicts among different generations. (Urick et al., 2017) However, what seems to be left out, in the literature we reviewed, is the focus on the work relationship between different generations in organizations. Though to us, this appears to be a very interesting and relevant research field to analyse and explore. For the purpose of this thesis, we chose to examine the work cohabitation between the Millennial and the Baby Boomer generation with a specific focus on leader-follower relationships.
We explicitly want to focus our study on that topic, because Millennials and Baby Boomers are the two most opposite generations currently involved in the labour market: Millennials who represent the generation that newly entered the labour market and Baby Boomers who have been working for most of their life and who are in their final years before retirement. We see Millennials as a highly important and interesting group of people who are emerging into the business scene. With their shifting values, they part themselves more and more from older generations. (Weber, 2017) Furthermore, Weber (2017) suggests that these evolving differences ‘are attributed to culture, upbringing, life experiences, and other forces impacting an individual’s life and shaping their value set (Weber 2017, p. 517).’

This study will give us the opportunity to not only examine potential conflicts, but also advantages of multigenerational workplaces. Our aim for this master thesis is to find out how generational differences might affect leader-follower work relationships between Millennials and Baby Boomers. We assume that we will discover various values, perceptions and expectations related to leader-follower relationships between Millennials and Baby Boomers in organizational contexts.

In the perspective of necessarily differentiating age and life-stage with generation, Cogin (2012) mentions a study in which Egri and Ralston (2004) identified how cultural, political and economic developments, which occur during the growing up time of various generations, define values, attitudes, beliefs and expectations of these generational groups. It is stated that behaviours and attitudes which are cultivated in one’s formative years are persistent despite changes in life-stage. (Cogin, 2012) As one example, Smith and Clurman (1997) point out a study, in which people from the Traditional generation, when they were in their young adult years, were questioned to choose between going to college to educationally improve themselves or learning skills on a job. Immensely, they chose to work and therefore learn skills on a job. When Baby Boomers, at the same age, were asked the originally posed question, they immensely chose going to college. (Cogin, 2012)

Several recent studies have done longitudinal research such as time-lag studies and sequential longitudinal analyses, which give insight on generational change over time. With the help of these study designs, researchers found differences which are not attributed solely to age. (Lyons et al., 2015)

We are aware that there are certain aspects people are impacted by due to their life stage and age, which do not specifically have to do with their generational membership. However, at this point we want to make clear that we, in our thesis, focus particularly on generations, not
groups whose members are in a certain life-stage. We therefore do not use “generation” as a synonym for ”age” and we do not focus on life-stages. Our aim is to take a closer look at generations, analyse their experiences and behaviours on the basis of theory as well as our own study empirically.

1.4 Research Question and Objective of Study

First, the thesis offers an insight of the Millennial generation compared to the Baby Boomer generation, which provides knowledge of what these two generations view as relevant, what they believe and what they expect from their workplace. Secondly, we want to examine how Millennials and Baby Boomers perceive their work relationship with each other and therefore look at their various values, beliefs and work ethics. The aim of this thesis is to find out what characteristics of work relationships can be found when Millennials are leaders or when Baby Boomers are in the leading position. For this master thesis, we want to specifically go further into and understand how leader-follower relationships are experienced between Millennials and Baby Boomers. We assume this is where generational diversity can have a lot of influence on the work atmosphere, work satisfaction as well as the business outcome in organizations. In order to fulfil the aim of this thesis and to navigate the base of the empirical study, the research question is created as followed:

How do Millennials and Baby Boomers experience their leader-follower work relationships?

a) When Millennials are leaders and Baby Boomers are followers

b) When Millennials are followers and Baby Boomers are leaders

Throughout the thesis, we will continuously address this question and with the help of our theoretical framework as well as our empirical study, answer the question in the conclusion of this thesis. In order to do so, we will elaborate the question by examining how Millennials, as well as Baby Boomers, perceive each other’s leader-follower relationship. Furthermore, the findings of this thesis shall be an important contribution as well as a possibility for leaders to understand how two opposite generations might experience and perceive their cohabitation in a multigenerational workplace. Due to the high occurrence of generational diversity across organizations worldwide, the thesis is not only interesting for leaders of the Millennial and Baby Boomer generation but would most likely be of interest for anyone in a leading or
following position who works in multigenerational workplaces. This could especially include family businesses because that is a place where different generations cohabitate very likely with each other, however, this topic can also be of interest for any other company where different generations work together.

1.5 Thesis Outline

This master thesis is structured into five chapters that are comprised in Introduction, Theoretical Framework, Methodology, Empirical Data and Analysis as well as the Conclusion.

The first chapter provides an introduction into the thesis topic, starting with a description of the background, followed by the problem discussion, relevance of the research, a discussion of the objective of the study, the research question and finally summing up with a chapter outline.

The subsequent chapter illustrates the theoretical framework of the thesis topic. The main content of this chapter includes a theoretical literature review of generations, generational diversity, Baby Boomers, Millennials, work relationships and leader-follower relationships, which are the six fields of study that provide the theoretical frame for the following research of the thesis.

The third chapter comprises the methodology which is the part where the process of collecting the empirical data is described. The research study is conducted in a qualitative research method, which is organized in an inductive research approach. The Methodology chapter also contains the description of primary data collection and the analysis process of the research method.

The fourth chapter contains the empirical data collection as well as the analysis of it. First, the chapter provides an overview of the answers given by the interview participants in each interview category. Afterwards, the interviewees’ experiences are categorised into nine different areas, showing the results for both leader-follower relationships. This chapter is finalised by a discussion of the analysis, comparing both leader-follower relationships with each other and the theoretical data.

The final chapter gives an answer to our research question and discusses which contributions our thesis offers for research as well as practitioners and what limitations evolved during the
research process. Further research prospects and a description of our own journey of learning will sum up the final chapter of the thesis.

2 Theoretical framework – What is already known?

The theoretical framework in this chapter provides the relevant theoretical background for the purpose of this study. It consists of two major components, of which the first one is Generations and the second one Relationships. The first component includes a theoretical analysis of generations, generational diversity, Baby Boomers and Millennials. The second component starts with a description of work relationships and is followed by a theoretical analysis of leader-follower relationships.

2.1 Generations

In order to understand the contents of generational diversity and what this term means, first, we provide an overview of what “generations” are. In their article, Amayah and Gedro (2014) mention two definitions of the term “generation” which they have decided to use as a basis for their study. The first one views generations as a ‘group of people who were born and raised in a similar social and historical atmosphere (Amayah & Gedro 2014, p. 38).’ This definition is commonly used and originally derived from the generational theory father Karl Mannheim, who asserted generations rather as a sociological than a biological issue and defined them as agents of social change (Joshi et al., 2011). Mannheim was a Hungarian sociologist whose theory, due to his essay “The Problem of Generations” in 1928, is still a highly used reference in scholarly work on generations. Even though his findings are often criticized by newer authors who challenge his views, especially due to unclarity and confusion about his definition of generations and his methodological approach, still his definition of generations forms the basis of how the generational term is implemented in modern thinking. (Joshi et al., 2011; Lub et al., 2012; Tiemann, 2005; Kertzer, 1983) Mannheim argued that people within the same generation share a common consciousness, hence, develop collective experiences, memories and ideas. It is claimed that people who grow up in the same time period are socialized into having similar sets of beliefs, expectations, preferences and values, which has an influence on their general behaviour. (Cogin, 2012; Ng & Parry, 2016)
Amayah and Gedro’s (2014) second description of generations, similar to the one above, is originally defined by Kupperschmidt (2000) and expounds ‘generation as an identifiable group (cohorts) that shares birth years, age location, and significant life events at critical development stages (Amayah & Gedro, 2014, p. 38).’ Common influences such as media, economy, society values, popular culture or major innovations, can determine shared characteristics of a generation during critical development stages of that generation. (DelCampo et al., 2011; King et al., 2017) Other noteworthy definitions of generations, which are not as dominant in literature as the previously mentioned ones, describe generations as a “social construction”, a “system of relations” as well as a “historical connection” and a “gendered social relation” (Foster, 2013).

In this context, it is useful to mention the generational persona, which Howe and Strauss (2000) describe as a peer personality of every generation. There are three attributes which identify the generational persona: Perceived membership in a common generation, a common location in history and common beliefs and behaviours. The first one describes the generational self-perception and generational identity which one starts to develop during adolescence. During that time, a member of one generation recognizes to distinguish oneself from other generations. A common location in history can be interpreted as a scenery of contemporary trends and events by which every rising generation defines itself. Finally, the third attribute means, due to collective experience-making while growing up, people from the same generation share common traits in their beliefs and behaviours. Howe and Strauss (2000) are convinced that the generational persona exists, even though they are aware that there are many individual exceptions. (Howe & Strauss, 2000)

However, the concept of generations is also criticised in the literature. Macky et al. (2008) argue that people are too much put into categories due to the generational concept. Although people who are born within the same time frame, experience, for instance, the same social and political events, it does not mean that they also experience them in the same way. Therefore, the same happenings can lead to different characteristic traits and generalisations of a generation need to be handled very carefully. (Macky et al. 2008)

The generation term, as it is used in this thesis, is not to confound with family generations such as children, parents and grandparents. Generations, in the context of this thesis, are groups of individuals who share generational membership due to their position in the same age-group in historical time. Members of the same generation are roughly the same age during the occurrences of historical and social events. Especially in key development stages such as
young adulthood, individuals form their own unique reactions to these historical phenomena. (Kowske et al., 2010) As Kowske et al. (2010) mention, ‘shared experiences in key developmental points contribute to the unique characteristics (e.g., values, attitudes, personality) that define and differentiate one generation from another (Kowske et al., 2010, p. 266).’ In turn, these shared characteristics have an impact on social forces and societal change (Kowske et al., 2010). As described in our Introduction, the current generations are divided into Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z (Orkan & Solmaz, 2015). Though for the purpose of this thesis, we decided to take a closer look at Baby Boomers and Millennials, whom we will describe in further detail in the upcoming chapters 2.1.2 and 2.1.3.

2.1.1 Generational Diversity

“That I work with other generations has a positive influence on me. I feel that I can learn a lot from the experiences of the older generation.”

(Jens E., 2018 Interview Participant)

Generational diversity evolves due to the fact that people from different generations, who do not grow up in the same time period, have different experiences and memories. In their studies, many authors have found generational diversity and explain the differences based on social experiences, which are shared by members of the same generation. Through a longitudinal study, Smola and Sutton (2002), for example, found that work values are rather influenced by generational experiences than biological age. It is suggested that early values and expectations might change as people move into a new stage of their life, but it is also demonstrated that each generation does that adaptation in their own way. (Lub et al., 2012)

People from the same generation are more likely to display similar aspects of cognitive functioning, due to the fact that they interpret events in a similar manner and share a common structure of communication (King et al., 2017). When it comes to values, expectations, preferences, goals and behaviours in a work context, a higher amount of studies has identified differences instead of similarities in these categories across generations. Amayah and Gedro (2014) have also identified more studies that found cross-generational differences instead of similarities in the categories organizational commitment, work attitude and motivation. (Amayah & Gedro, 2014)
To give an example of these differences, in her article, Cogin (2012) points out that Generation X and Millennials perceive work in a different way as well as behave and think differently than Traditionalists or Baby Boomers. Several studies reveal that Millennials are much more open to job mobility than workers of the Baby Boomer generation. (Cogin, 2012) Millennials are more likely to change their jobs more frequently due to their need of finding their place in the labour market and trying out different occupations before they want to settle with the right one. (Pyöriä et al., 2017)

Empirical studies have also found generational diversity in intrinsic and extrinsic rewards related to work, pride in craftsmanship, job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Zabel et al., 2017). Only regarding altruistic rewards, there were no significant differences to be found across generations (Schullery, 2013). More specific characteristics of our two chosen generations, Millennials and Baby Boomers, is presented in the following chapters.

Generational differences do not only exist in workplaces but also have an influence on certain aspects of work such as communication styles, technology needs, workplace expectations and desired leadership styles (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011). Much literature points out that ‘generational differences impact all areas of management, including recruitment, training and development, career development, rewards, working arrangements and management style (Lub et al., 2012).’ Due to the findings of value, expectation and motivation differences across generational groups, it is important that leaders adapt their management practices accordingly (Cogin, 2012). Leaders need to be conscious of generational differences and aware that every generation has their own strengths and weaknesses. Even though some strengths and weaknesses might be on an individual basis, it is important to know that there are differences which are argued to be on a generational basis as well. (DelCampo et al., 2011)

In this context, it is also important to mention that generational diversity is rather often seen as a trigger for conflicts within workplaces (Birkman, 2016). These conflicts are in most cases triggered by generational expectation, behaviour and mindset differences. Existing, normative behaviour is, for example, challenged by young workers’ preferences of digital communication, autonomous work and flexible work schedules. (Mendelson, 2013) Even though generational clashes are commonly mentioned in scholarly work, Holian (2015) points out, it is important that ‘having a range of backgrounds and experiences in the workplace can allow organizations to draw on the best aspects of diversity (Holian, 2015, p. 281).’
2.1.2 Baby Boomers

“With technology, I have troubles sometimes at work, but I don’t really mind because I can always ask somebody of the younger generation who is willing to help me out.”

(Ines E., 2018, Interview participant)

After World War II the birth rate increased quickly in most European countries as well as in North America (Williamson, 2013). People who were born during that time belong to the Baby Boomer generation (Williamson, 2008). Most studies define the Baby Boomer generation as people born between the years 1946 - 1964 (Twenge, 2010; Kumar & Lim, 2008; Venter, 2017; Dohm, 2000). Only some studies vary and include the years 1945 or even 1943 and end the time frame already in 1960 (Yu & Miller, 2005; Yang & Guy, 2006). For our study, we chose to define Baby Boomers as people born between 1946 - 1964, since most studies refer to this time frame. Generally, there are two waves of Baby Booms described within that time frame. Studies mention that the first Baby Boom was between 1946 - 1955, directly after the Second World War. After that time, the birth rate first declined and then increased again in the second half of the 1950s with its peak around 1964. (Williamson, 2008)

Since the Baby Boomer generation is spanning over a long time-period, the experiences among people within this generation vary. (Venter, 2017) Especially Baby Boomers of the first wave grew up in a rapidly growing peace time and the liberalisation of civil rights and social politics. As adults, they came into a time of consumerism, supported by the welfare state and easy credits, however, they also experienced the problematic of socio-economic changes during the 1970s. (Williamson, 2008)

A great change in technology happened during the years when the Baby Boomer generation grew up. Baby Boomers have therefore witnessed major changes in this area (Kumar & Lim, 2008). Venter (2017) also agrees in his study, “Bridging the communication gap between Generation Y and the Baby Boomer generation”, that Baby Boomers have been witnesses of major technological developments such as the telephone and television. Baby Boomers are therefore often called “Digital Immigrants”. “Digital” is seen as their second language which they have to learn, while in comparison, Generation Y is seen as “Digital natives”. (Venter, 2017) Nevertheless, Baby Boomers were also part of important political changes and events like the Cold War for instance. Furthermore, they joined political campaigns to protect civil rights and gain recognition on topics such as race, gender and sexual orientation. (Williamson, 2008) Baby Boomers witnessed the hippie culture and showed an increased
entrepreneurialism with a self-help movement and a rise of the New Age spiritualism (Yang & Guy, 2006).

The high birth rate of the Baby Boomers had a major effect on several aspects of the economy during the last 50 years. Furthermore, the high numbers of Baby Boomers determined the age and size composition of employment over the last 30 years. In 1978 for example, when Baby Boomers were between 15-32 years old, the labour force consisted of 45% of Baby Boomers. (Dohm, 2000) Nowadays, the youngest Baby Boomers are 54 years old while the oldest ones are 72 years old. More and more Baby Boomers are retiring every year which means the number of Baby Boomers in the workforce is decreasing continuously. (Fry, 2018) It is important to understand this generational shift since it will affect many areas such as workplaces for instance (Twenge, 2010).

Based on their experiences, Baby Boomers are associated with certain attitudes and values, which are supposed to differ from their parents’ as well as their children’s generation (Williamson, 2013). Due to the technological developments during the last years, the way how people communicate has changed over time. In the past, people were communicating face-to-face or via written letters. These ways of communication, however, were either sometimes not possible or very slow. Thanks to the invention of telephonic communication, a much easier way of contacting people was developed. Nevertheless, Baby Boomers still prefer face-to-face communication and mostly use phone or email when a face-to-face communication is not possible. Very seldom they use, for example, instant messaging in order to fulfil their interpersonal communication needs. (Venter, 2017; Seipert & Baghurst, 2014)

Young and Tinker (2017) evaluate, in their study, the likely needs and priorities which Baby Boomers of the 1960s are expected to have in their later life. In this study, they characterise Baby Boomers with a high level of technological proficiency and education. Additionally, they are supposed to have a youthful self-image. Since Baby Boomers have longer work lives, they show a higher level of consumption in comparison to previous generations. (Young & Tinker, 2017) When Baby Boomers entered the workplaces, corporate loyalty was of high importance and long careers in one organisation were usual. During their professional life, Baby Boomers have experienced different phases of the progressive economy. Therefore, Baby Boomers went through the phases of being predominantly industrial workers to the phase of service workers and knowledge workers. (Yu & Miller, 2005)

values of other generations in his study “A Review of the Empirical Evidence on Generational Differences in Work Attitudes”. In this study, he states that Baby Boomers have a higher work centrality and value work more for its own sake than recent generations. Furthermore, Twenge describes the Baby Boomers’ desire to have jobs that include greater responsibility and are more willing to do unpaid overwork than newer generations. Furthermore, Baby Boomers are supposed to need less freedom from their supervisors and think less about leaving their jobs. (Twenge, 2010) In line with Twenge’s statements go Venter (2017), Seipert and Baghurst (2014) as well as Yu and Miller (2005), who say that career is very important for Baby Boomers and they believe in stability of professional life, loyalty and commitment. They wish for long-term employment and are willing to leave family and free time behind to guarantee stable work. (Venter, 2017; Seipert & Baghurst, 2014)

Additionally, Venter (2017) describes Baby Boomers as competitive. He argues that Baby Boomers are competitive due to the high amount of people in the Baby Boomer generation, which gives them the need to outclass, especially in workplaces. However, due to career pressure from newer generations and the lacking technological knowledge, Baby Boomers find it hard to continue excelling at work. Furthermore, it is said that people of the Baby Boomer generation show respect for authorities and hierarchies and expect respect from younger generations. While younger generations are used to multi-tasking and multi-media, with an approach to fun ways of learning, Baby Boomers are more used to step-by-step learning and prefer doing one thing after another. Seipert and Baghurst (2014) add, that Baby Boomers favour trainer-centred settings instead of decentralized trainings, which are preferred by younger generations (Seipert & Baghurst, 2014).

Regarding leadership, Baby Boomers assume a chain of command and want their managers to lead them and give directions towards organisational goals. The implication of Yu and Miller (2005) is, therefore, to rather use task-oriented leadership styles than a relationship-oriented style for Baby Boomers. (Yu & Miller, 2005)
2.1.3 Millennials

“We, Millennials, have been taught that everything is possible.”
(Oskar J., 2018, Interview participant)

The term “Millennials” is often used as a synonym for the term “Generation Y” (Howe & Strauss, 2000), hence, many scholars use these terms quite equally. For the purpose of this thesis, we decided to only work with the term “Millennials”, because this is the one we feel most familiar with. Why though is this generation called “Millennials”? They are called Millennials because they grew up in the time when one millennium ended and another one began (Lyons, 2016). However, this particular generation is associated with various terms in different countries. In Sweden, for example, Millennials are called the “Curling Generation”, which stands as a metaphor for the ones whose surroundings make sure their journey runs smoothly and unhindered. On the other hand, in Germany, this generation goes by the name “Generation Maybe”, which is used as a metaphor for the ones who are well educated and highly connected but have an overwhelming amount of possibilities, which makes them unsure what to commit on. (Lyons, 2016)

Based on many scholars, we found a wide range of birth years ascribed to Millennials. Some articles state the years 1982-1999 (Schullery, 2013), in others we found the years 1980-2000 (Weber, 2017) and even other articles state the years 1981-2000 (DelCampo, 2011). However, for the purpose of our thesis, we are using the average of birth years we found and set the range between the years 1982-2000.

Millennials grew up in a changing world, filled with events such as the 9/11 attacks, the innovation of computers, development of social media, natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004 as well as an increase in diversity and a high amount of terrorism. (White, 2011; DelCampo, 2011; Lyons, 2016) They experienced the growth of technology and the internet, which makes them yet the most skilled generation in terms of adapting to technological innovations (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). The often with Millennials associated term “helicopter parents”, describes the parents of the Millennial generation who are trying to hover around their kids and have an overprotective interest in their children’s life (Cogin, 2012).

As Millennials start and continue entering workplaces, they not only seem to differ in various ways from other generations, their very own value orientation also affects older generations in organizations. Even though Millennials’ characteristics are often compared with other
generations, DelCampo (2011) argues that they do have significant traits which define them as a unique group. Millennials are generally seen as being motivated to impact their workplaces in a positive way, being very open for working in teams, having the drive for open and frequent communications with their supervisors and feeling comfortable with communication through technology. (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; DelCampo, 2011) However, Millennials are also ascribed with characteristics such as being unmotivated, self-centred, disloyal and impatient (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Cogin, 2012).

Millennials are seen as the ones who are socialized in the digital world, have continuous access to digital information and are constantly connected with their network through social media. Being the technology generation can, on one hand, be seen as an advantage because, due to their networking skills, they are supposed to have high abilities to work with computers and being able to multitask as well as work quick and efficient. On the other hand, a high amount of technology and digitalization can also be disadvantageous, because it can be seen as a reason to view Millennials as being excessively self-consumed as well as seeking too high amounts of personal attention. Despite from that, Millennials are attributed to be supporters of a balanced work-life, which makes them perceive work as just one priority in life. Millennials prefer a collective workplace rather than hierarchical structures and therefore don’t value rank as much as respect for ability and accomplishment. Hence, they generally need to see a meaning in what they do, privately and at their workplace. Millennials are the one generation which is most likely to question existing workplace expectations such as typical working hours. (Cogin, 2012; DelCampo, 2011)

Due to an increased level of education and diversity, this generation demands flexibility in their work as well as strive for fairness and tolerance (Lyons, 2016; DelCampo, 2011; Cogin, 2012). With their parents as empowering influences, Millennials are not only considered to be the most educated group of people nowadays, they are also seen as soon being the most powerful workforce in organizations. With roughly 80 million generational members, Millennials as the fastest growing segment are slowly making up the majority of the workforce, are the soon to be leaders of business organizations as well as will shortly form the largest group of consumers. (Weber, 2017; Marcinkus-Murphy, 2012) Millennials not only value openness and transparency in their workplace, they also favour a rather inclusive style of management and team orientation. Another aspect of a unique millennial work value is the drive for receiving constructive feedback on a daily basis and having the possibility of being empowered by others. (Cogin, 2012) Millennials are very likely to be in the need of having an
interest in and being challenged by the work they do as well as prefer being independent in their own decision making. (Kuron et al., 2015; Lub et al., 2012)

Millennials are also considered to be the job-hop generation who move around more likely and don’t stay in one workplace if they are not fully engaged in their work. (Pyöriä et al., 2017; Schullery, 2013) They rather search for new experiences by either travelling or doing temporary jobs that are unrelated to their education. Hence, Millennials do not, as previous generations, want to entirely commit to one company, but rather take their time in finding the “right” job. (DelCampo, 2011)

2.2 Relationships

2.2.1 Work Relationships

“When you value each other and know what you can learn from the other one, the Millennial from the Baby Boomer and the other way around, then it can work very well and it is only an enrichment for both sides.”

(Fabienne R., 2018 Interview participant)

A relationship describes how two or more people, as well as even things, are connected with each other (Oxford University Press, 2018). Campbell et al. (2008) describe the assumption that people have a perception of positive outcomes from being in relationships. In workplaces, they describe that relationships are able to present ways of exchanging information and coordination of effort. They characterise interpersonal relationships with variables which include intimacy, emotional closeness, connectedness, constructiveness, stability, positivity and negativity. (Campbell et al., 2008)

According to many researchers, functional relationships are one of the key factors for success in workplaces. Tallia et al. (2006) describe the following characteristics as the main factors for a working relationship: trust, diversity, mindfulness, interrelatedness, respect, varied interaction and effective communication (Tallia et al., 2006).

In addition to Tallia et al., Ferris et al. (2009) also agree that work relationships are the foundations of organisations and have an influence on what can be accomplished. The ability to manage networks within and additionally across organisational boundaries is seen as a competency in organisations where the interpersonal dynamic among the key actors is important. Therefore, they argue that it is necessary to have a focus on interpersonal skills in workplaces. Ferris et al. (2009) took a closer look at different dimensions which are
underlying concepts for work relationships, in their study “Relationships at Work: Toward a Multidimensional Conceptualization of Dyadic Work Relationships”. One of the main underlying dimensions they found is trust, which they portray as an essential factor for sustaining relationships. They argue that trust is an important element for achieving success in most business and employment relationships and can diminish uncertainty concerning the future. (Ferris et al., 2009)

Trust is a topic which is studied in several areas and is usually explained as a set of expectation in particular related constraints and parameters. In their study, Ferris et al. (2009) define three different types of trust in relationships, which can also be seen as stages of trust development and therefore relationship stages. The first stage is deterrence-based-trust, which is based on consistent behaviour. The second stage is knowledge-based-trust, which arises when someone has adequate information about someone else in order to be able to understand and predict possible behaviour. The last stage, identification-based-trust, is based on empathy towards another person’s intentions and desires. As the simplified model of relationship stages, they mention: (1) Initial interaction (2) Development and expansion (3) Expansion and commitment (4) Increased interpersonal commitment. (Ferris et al., 2009)

Furthermore, Ferris et al. (2009) look at different dyadic work relationships which include, for example, the concept of leader-member exchange, employee-organisation relationships, social networks, mentoring and positive connections at work. In all these types of work relationships, Ferris et al. (2009) found in addition to trust also support, affect, loyalty, accountability, instrumentality, flexibility and respect as relevant dimensions for work relationships. (Ferris et al., 2009)

### 2.2.2 Leader-Follower Relationships

“I value the relationship to my boss because she makes sure we have a cooperative work climate where every team member is treated equally.”

(Martin G., 2018, Interview Participant)

Relating the topic of work relationships specifically to leader-follower relationships, Evans’ study “The Dynamics of the Leader Follower Relationship” (2010) examines aspects which influence particularly leader-follower relationships: Dynamics of ambiguity, Resources, Environment, Symbiosis, Politics and “Playing games”. Evans (2010) argues in his study that
leader-follower relationships can be seen as social symbioses in which both parties support each other, since they are aware of needing each other. (Evans, 2010)

According to the study of Campbell et al. (2008), in a leader-follower relationship, leaders are supposed to give guidance and resources to the followers, while followers on the other hand are believed to complete their tasks for which they get rewards. The study takes specifically a closer look at constructive and competitive relationships and is relating that to charisma. Campbell et al.’s (2008) result of the study describes constructive relationships as positively related and on the other hand competitive relationships as negatively related to charisma. Furthermore, they describe the development of leader-member relationships as a step-based model which starts with a series of transactional exchanges. Later on, the transactional exchanges advance into a rather stable relationship based on trust. (Campbell et al., 2008)

Grayson and Speckhart (2006) illustrate, in their study “The Leader-Follower Relationship: Practitioner Observations”, that being a leader is usually seen as more glorified than being a follower. In their article, they make five observations about leader-follower relationships:

1) Because of the glorification of leadership, more people want to become leaders; however, some might be better followers. Grayson and Speckhart observed moreover that some of the leaders did not want to be a leader in the first place.

2) Not enough attention is paid on the development of skilled followers in order to improve their followership. Due to digitalization, followers become more sceptical nowadays and consequently, leaders have to do more to gain their trust and respect. Furthermore, followers often contribute rather directly to the success of an organization in comparison to a leader (exp: A cashier in the supermarket has a direct influence on the customer satisfaction in comparison to the leader who is rather working with background processes).

3) To be “the number two” is also important and followers also need to be highly competent. Sometimes they have same analytical skills as leaders, but might not have the right amount of courage when it comes to the implementation of recommendations.

4) The collaboration between leader and follower is important. They seem to be more similar than expected.

5) There are not many theories about followership, but it would be good for leaders to know characteristics and behaviours of followers in order to be able to lead them in a better way. (Grayson & Speckhart, 2006)
In their study, Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) argue in line with Grayson and Speckhart and examine the importance of relational research, by presenting leadership and followership studies, which result in a focus on relational dynamics in leadership approaches. Within this approach, leadership is understood as being a shared process between leaders and followers. In this study, various relations views are presented, including the leader-member exchange and Hollander’s relational view. Furthermore, different followership theory approaches are presented, such as the Role-theory approach in which being a follower is seen as a rank or position, and the constructionist approach which supports the idea of leadership as a co-creation between leading and following. (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014)

In the study, “Understanding the Dynamics of Leadership: The Role of Follower Self-Concepts in the Leader/Follower Relationship” by Lord et al. (1999), leadership is documented as a social process which is depending on leaders as well as followers. This study of Lord et al. (1999) integrates the theory of self-concept within the leadership theory. The authors see the self-concept as a dominant determinant for the behaviour and reactions of followers towards leaders. The conceptualize self is, according to Lord et al. (1999), defined in three levels which include the individual, interpersonal and group level. Lord et al. (1999) argue that outcomes of the self on behaviour and information processing are intervened by the working self-concept. The working self-concept integrates self-views, possible selves and goals. In their view, leaders are able to achieve short-term changes through influencing the working self-concept and long-term changes by developing chronic schema. However, they also discuss the influence subordinates have on the leader’s self-schema. Summarized, Lord et al. (1999) state that leaders in leader-follower relationships can influence followers’ behaviour, social processes and perceptions, while followers have vice versa also impact on the perception of leaders. (Lord et al., 1999)

As mentioned above, Evans (2010) examines dimensions of leader-follower relationships in his study, “The Dynamics of the Leader Follower Relationship”. In this study, Evans presents a critical view about leadership theories. Evans argues, in line with Alvesson and Willmott (2001), who explain the difficulty in differentiating between an “effective leader” and an “efficient manager”. This is why these concepts are usually used as substitutes in Evans’ study. He defines a leader as someone who is capable of defining an organisation’s reality by articulating a vision which reflects his or her definition of a mission and the underlying values of an organisation. (Evans, 2010)
Evans (2010) explains the changes of leadership theories over the past centuries and the development of the New Leadership Approach in the 1980s. Furthermore, he describes the concept of Transformational Leadership, which views leadership as a shared process. This leadership approach supports the idea that leadership is a process which refers to influencing changes in assumptions and attitudes of organisational members. Hence, subordinates get empowered for influencing the organisation’s transformation. In his study, Evans points out the importance of charisma and inspiration as major components of leaders’ behaviours. Furthermore, individualised consideration and intellectual stimulation are seen as components which are related to the performance of followers. (Evans, 2010)

When focussing on followers, Evans’ study, as well as other studies, argues that a leader needs followers to be seen as a leader. Nevertheless, the role of followers is mostly underplayed with too much focus on leadership studies. However, the view of leadership approaches is changing from one-way relationships to both-way relationships. Evans addresses, in his study, several examples of perspectives on values and roles of followers:

1) Followers as moderators of leadership:
Followers have a rather passive role in this perspective and are the receivers of leadership. Nevertheless, this perspective acknowledges that the leader’s influence might have to vary depending on who is addressed as a follower.

2) Followers as substitutes for leadership:
This perspective describes leadership as an important behaviour that should be examined in relation to factors which can neutralise or substitute a leader’s influence. As substitute characteristics, Evans mentions experience, ability, knowledge, training, the need for independence, indifference to organisational rewards and professional orientation.

3) Followers as constructors of leadership:
In this perspective, followers are seen to be in a leadership relationship, however, do not take on the followership.

Evans states that actions of followers should be appreciated as a part of the leadership process and are acting in symbiosis with leaders. (Evans, 2010)
3 Methodology – How are we doing it?

This Methodology chapter provides a description and explanation of our research approach and research strategy, where we argue what we chose and why we decided on it. These aspects are followed by an illustration of our sample selection as well as data collection, of which the ladder includes our operationalisation, the author’s role within the research and our interview process. Next, a description of our data analysis is conducted and the chapter is finished up by discussing scientific criteria.

3.1 Research approach

Three major approaches are existent in research, which are the deductive, inductive and abductive approach (Saunders et al., 2016). The deductive research approach aims to test the connection between theory and reality. In this approach, data is collected and conclusions are drawn in relation to the pre-understanding of theory. In comparison to the deductive research approach, which is based on theory, the inductive research approach is based on the empirical data. Conclusions are drawn from the empirical data and the theoretical material is guided by it. (Bryman & Bell, 2015) The abductive research approach is defined by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2008) as the procedure of using standing theory in order to discover theoretical patterns, which clarify empirical patterns that can be found from the interpretation of an occasion. (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008)

Our study is influenced by an inductive approach. Inductive approaches are used to explore phenomena and recognize patterns and themes in order to create conceptual frameworks (Saunders et al., 2016). In our study, we are exploring the phenomenon of generations and work relationships and develop categories based on our empirical findings, which express areas of experience.

Before starting the empirical data collection, we had a theoretical pre-understanding. Despite from having a theoretical pre-understanding, our study is on a great level directed by empirical data. Our interview guide was only loosely grounded on the theoretical part of the thesis and for the conduction of the analysis, the empirical data was our starting point. The attempt for our study was not to discover patterns in the reality, which can validate the theory. Our attempt was to discover empirical findings of the topic, which could then lead us to new possible theoretical concepts. In our opinion, the inductive approach is most suitable for our study, since it gives us the opportunity to base our thesis on the empirical data which we
collected. Through that way, we were able to construct a study that is grounded on the actual insight of empirical data.

3.2 Research Strategy

To conduct an empirical study, two research methods are usable: Quantitative and qualitative studies. Quantitative research methods are based on a large number of numeric data. The numeric data are transformed from collected information and are administered through statistical data analysis. This research strategy is fitting if less detailed perceptions of a large number of respondents are needed. (Olsson & Sörensen, 2011; Bryman & Bell, 2015)

A qualitative research method is in comparison to a quantitative research method more nuanced and detailed. When using qualitative research methods, empirical data is gathered from more in-depth but fewer sources. The most common way to collect data is by conducting interviews (Quinn, 2002; Merriam, 1998). Researchers who are using a qualitative approach participate actively in the research process and provide their subjective perspectives, since they typically do not have a clear idea about a possible result yet (Quinn, 2002).

Since our study has an exploratory character and our goal is to provide an insight on the topic of multigenerational leader-follower relationships in workplaces, we used a qualitative research method. Furthermore, the aim of our study is it to get a profound understanding of the research problem and receive detailed as well as nuanced information in order to answer our research question. Hence, we found the qualitative research approach most suitable for our study. Qualitative studies have the underlying assumption that each phenomenon involves an exclusive mixture of attributes and qualities which lead to the impossibility to measure a phenomenon. (Andersen, 1994) Therefore, it is necessary to understand social phenomena from inside as well as in-depth. The concept of generations in this study is a complex social phenomenon for which a deep understanding is necessary to be able to comprehend its influence on the phenomenon of leader-follower relationships in workplaces. The drive of our qualitative study is to get an understanding of the phenomenon and interpret it from the perspective, experience and interpretation of the respondents, which is seen as the purpose of a qualitative research method. (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008)
3.3 Sample selection

In our study, we are looking at two different relationships:

- Millennials as leaders with Baby Boomers as followers
- Baby Boomers as leaders with Millennials as followers

In order to answer our research question with the two subversions, we had to find the best possible way for receiving evidence. Since we are looking at the issue of dyadic relationships, we found it necessary to get credible evidence from the participants of these relationships. Relationships can be perceived differently from both sides, therefore, we furthermore agreed to the need of getting information from both sides of the relationship participants. With our research question, we are also not limiting the study to the experiences, which can be made from only one generation or one side of a relationship. In order to equally explore the experiences in both relationships, we needed to include all four categories of participants of these relationships, as shown in Figure 1:

**Figure 1: Categories of Interview Participants**

![Diagram showing categories of interview participants: Millennials as Leaders, Baby Boomers as Followers, Baby Boomers as Leaders, Millennials as Followers]

*Source: Created by the authors*

To gain more sufficient evidence, we included multiple sources in each category. Through that, we assured that we can collect empirical data, which provides credibility for our data analysis.

We started our sampling process with a selection of criteria, which was essential for our decision of whom to choose as our interview participants. Merriam (1998) identifies this process as purposive sampling, which she describes as a form of nonprobability sampling strategy. In our study, we used the nonprobability sampling strategy, because to us it was the most suitable method to solve our qualitative research issue. We did that by discovering what
occurs between different generations in workplaces and what impact these occurrences have on the individuals we questioned. In purposive sampling, also referred to as criterion-based selection, the researcher needs to create a list of criteria which is necessary to pay attention to when proceeding to find and locate the sampling unit. (Merriam, 1998)

This was done during the process of our literature review. The essential criteria, which had to be fulfilled in order to participate in our study, were the matching birth years to be a member in the Millennial or Baby Boomer generation, a leader or follower position in a workplace and working with someone of the opposing generation in the opposing position. Hence, as shown in Figure 2, we first needed to identify who belongs to the Millennial and who to the Baby Boomer generation as well as how exactly leaders and followers are defined in our thesis.

**Figure 2: Criteria for Participant Sampling**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>• Born between 1984-2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Boomer</td>
<td>• Born 1946-1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>• Delegates tasks, has a team to lead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follower</td>
<td>• Someone who gets tasks delegated by someone else</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Created by authors

Due to our aspiration to receive the most honest answers, our selected Baby Boomers and Millennials did not have to work with each other or be related in any way. We decided to rather use unrelated individuals instead of pairs who work together. The current occupation of our interview participants was random because in order to answer our research question it was not relevant in which industry sector they work. To find interview participants for our study, we used network sampling, which we evaluated as a helpful and very efficient sampling strategy. (Merriam, 1998) Our way to find interview participants was to ask our personal network to refer us to people who they know would fit in our study. We then identified potential participants whom we asked if they would be willing to take part in our empirical study. Finally, we found sixteen interview participants with whom we each had a thirty to sixty-minute interview.
We decided to do four interviews in each category because we saw it as the perfect amount to receive a lot of insight for each category. More interviews in each category would possibly not have given us more useful information and might have led us to repeated responses to our questions. Furthermore, it could have biased us, as the authors, since it could have led us to ask leading interview questions as we would already expect certain answers from the interviewees. We saw 16 interviews in total also as the number of interviews which was still doable considering the given time frame for the thesis.

**Table 1: Interview Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Millennials as leaders</th>
<th>Baby Boomers as leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth year</td>
<td>Birth year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander H.</td>
<td>Philippe G.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice CEO</td>
<td>Hotel Operations Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bianca K.</td>
<td>Roger H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team leader Salary Department</td>
<td>Head of Office Forwarding Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim W.</td>
<td>Kirsten D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warehouse Manager</td>
<td>Team leader Logistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex W.</td>
<td>Christoph K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Railcargo Center</td>
<td>CEO and founder Physiotherapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex W.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Railcargo Center</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jens E.</td>
<td>Martina M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs Teacher</td>
<td>Kindergarten Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabienne R.</td>
<td>Heike H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten Teacher</td>
<td>Tax office administration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Created by the authors
3.4 Data collection

When it comes to a qualitative research design, there are many different methods of gathering data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Examples of main types of evidence are documents, records, interviews and observations (Gillham, 2000). Since our research question implies that our approach is to gather information about what experiences our participants personally have in relation to other generations, we decided to use open interviews to collect our data. Additionally, open interviews gave us the possibility to find out about how the participants individually evaluate their own work ethics, values and expectations. In order to gather all required information, we found interviews the most suitable source for our study, because they gave us the opportunity to obtain the special information we needed and to find out what is in the mind of our participants. Interviewing is the only way how to get specific information from past events which are impossible to replicate. What we wanted to study was nothing we could directly observe because feelings, thoughts and individual meanings which people attach to occurrences cannot be observed - we had to ask for them. (Merriam 1998) As Patton (1990) mentions, ‘the purpose of interviewing, then, is to enter into the other person’s perspective (Patton, 1990).’

The collected and analysed data in our study consists therefore exclusively of primary data. A semi-structured interview guide was created in order to collect the necessary data for this study. In a literature review, we got familiar with the literature related to our area of study. (Corbin & Strauss, 2015)

3.4.1 Operationalisation

In order to conduct our interviews, it was necessary to operationalize the two major concepts of our study. The Interview guide contains open and broad questions, which are strongly based on and connected to the theoretical framework of our study. Due to our assumption that not all interview participants are familiar with the terms work ethics, values as well as beliefs, instead of directly mentioning these terms, we rather asked what they expect from their work and what they find important in their workplace. Related to the answers of our interview participants, we asked individual follow-up questions for further clarification and to get more knowledge about their experiences. These follow-up questions were helpful in order to understand what exactly the interview participants meant and to receive more detailed answers. Due to our qualitative approach and based on our research question, we wanted the interview participants to answer as individually and openly as possible, by explicitly asking
about their current experiences and feelings when working with different generations, and specifically with Millennials or Baby Boomers.

Due to a wide range of possible responses across our diverse interview partners, we designed the interview guide accordingly. Our questions were open to varying answers without the prejudice of answering right or wrong and with the high possibility of asking spontaneous individually based follow-up questions.

**Table 2: Operationalisation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major concepts</th>
<th>Sub concepts</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generations</td>
<td>Self-perception</td>
<td>What is important for you in a workplace? What do you expect in your work? How would you describe your work ethics?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Similarities vs. Differences</td>
<td>How do you experience working with other generations? (e.g. What similarities or differences do you experience in your and other generations’ work ethics?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work relationships</td>
<td>Relationship characteristics</td>
<td>What do you expect from work relationships?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Leader/follower</td>
<td>What do you expect from a relationship with your leader or your followers? How would you describe your work relationships in a leader/follower context?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Influence of generations on work relationships</td>
<td>Self-perception</td>
<td>Within your experiences in your leader/follower relationship, how has working with another generation influenced the relationship?</td>
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<td>Similarities vs. Differences</td>
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<td>Relationship characteristics</td>
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<td>Leader/follower</td>
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Source: Own creation based on interview guide

**3.4.2 Author’s role in the research**

In this empirical research, our role is to be value-free towards the knowledge that is produced through our research. We are not involving our worldview or personal bias into the theoretical as well as empirical research of this thesis and are therefore aspired to produce and provide
neutral information. (Taylor, 2011) As it is suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2015), we, as the authors of this qualitative research, consider ourselves as being curious, creative and especially very enthusiastic about studying our research topic. We decided on this topic because we wanted to expand our knowledge in this field and because we are truly interested in it. We are aware that this research is an opportunity for us to grow and to broaden our understanding of this topic. It also gave us the opportunity to get insight about the experiences our interview participants have, which we would not have received otherwise. (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) Most important in a qualitative research ‘is the desire to step beyond the known and enter into the world of participants, to see the world from their perspective (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 14).’ Therefore, to get the most of our empirical research, we, as the authors, had to treat our interview participants with respect, openness and welcome their statements without judgement. In addition, we consider ourselves as the owners of our text and take responsibility for what we present in our research. Our aspiration is to provide a unique and notable piece of research in which we see ourselves in the roles of the directors and actors.

3.4.3 Interviews

The interviews were conducted in the time frame between 20th March 2018 – 15th April 2018 and methodically hold on a skype or face-to-face basis. Many interview partners are from Germany and therefore share the same native language as us. Due to our assumption that some of our interview participants would transfer their emotions more easily and feel more comfortable to hold the interview in their native language, we translated the interview questions into German after we had put them together in English.

To prepare our interviews, we set up dates and times of approximately 45 minutes with each of our interview partners. Five interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis and eleven interviews were accomplished over video call on skype.

Not only serve face-to-face and video call interviews as a way to get direct answers from the interview participants, but also uncover their emotions and help the interviewer to easily clarify potential misunderstandings (Balzert, 2008; Mayer, 2008). Before starting the previously prepared interviews, we first explained our topic in few sentences to give our participants short insight what our study and master thesis is about. We then asked introduction questions, for formality reasons and to get a smooth start into the interview setting. These questions were about the participants’ birth year, their amount of work
experience, their current work position and workplace, and if the interviewees are in leading or following positions. These questions were needed in order to categorize our interview participants in one of our four sampling categories. Some of our interview participants communicated to us beforehand that they were worried they would give us wrong answers. For that reason and to make sure of a trusting and safe environment, we actively made clear that there are no right or wrong answers and that every individual given answer will be useful for our study.

For the purpose of our study, we used the form of individual interviews instead of group interviews, which made it possible to get a trustful and confidential interview atmosphere. Due to the reason that we did not involve focus groups in our study, that we were interested in the participants’ descriptions of experiences and that we explicitly wanted to interview unrelated individuals, it made most sense to implement individual interviews. (Brinkman, 2014)

Brinkman (2014) as well as Gillham (2000) describe the three most common types of interviews, which are: Structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Structured interviews are applied in surveys, often used in quantitative research and are in questionnaires structured on a word-by-word basis. These forms of interviews are arranged to not give information beyond what is asked. Semi-structured interviews are assumed to be the most common interview forms in qualitative research. They consist of structured questions or themes to a specific topic but give the participants the freedom to respond and discuss them in various ways. Semi-structured interviews give the possibility to produce knowledge and are open to potential dialogues between the interviewer and the interviewee. In unstructured interviews, the interviewer does not prepare interview questions in advance, but rather focuses on free storytelling and lets the interviewee determine what subjects to cover. (Gillham, 2000; Brinkman, 2014; Corbin & Morse, 2003)

To collect data for our research study, we used semi-structured interviews, because some form of structure was important for us to receive required information about topics that had to be discussed in order to answer our research question (Balzert, 2008). These were the participants’ experiences, their own value system and their judgement of their work relationship with the opposing generation. However, it was important to us to give our interview partners the possibility to discuss these aspects in a free manner. With follow-up and open questions, the interview participants were free to answer out of their thoughts and in their own individual way. Open questions are designed to have indefinite response
possibilities and contain answers that are not restricted in space. (Gray, 2014) As Gray (2014) mentions, ‘the advantage of open questions is the potential for richness of responses, some of which may not have been anticipated by the researchers (Gray, 2014).’

The interview partners, with their very personal way of answering, led the way through our interview guide which, to some extent, gave variation to the content of responses we received. Hence, in some interviews, we followed the structure of our guide more and in other interviews, we rather asked follow-up questions in between. This flexibility and their open answers were necessary for us to possibly get certain aspects covered, which were not considered as important in the theoretical part prior to the interviews, but turned out to be relevant for our interview participants.

Regarding the formalities of the interviews, we assured our participants confidential use of their answers to our interview questions and anonymisation of their names. We assume that handling their anonymity this way was also helpful for us in order to get honest and open answers. To avoid any sort of prejudices or pre-understandings, both authors of the thesis hold all sixteen interviews together and made sure that in each interview, one of the authors did not personally know the interview partner. That person then asked the interview questions and the other one took notes and observed. (Merriam, 1998) For our further procedure through the master thesis and especially our data analysis, we took notes during the interviews and recorded all of them.

3.5 Data analysis

Qualitative data is characterised as providing a richness and fullness for a study. Due to social constructionism, meaning and realities depend on the interview participants’ interpretation of happenings around them, which supplies the variation and complexity of qualitative data. (Saunders et al., 2016)

To analyse our data, we chose to use the qualitative content analysis, described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005). This analysis approach is used in qualitative studies (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Since we used a qualitative approach for our study, this kind of analysis suited us in order to analyse our empirical data. The qualitative content analysis offers flexibility for the analysis of text data. It includes a range of different analytical approaches including, for example, interpretative, systematic or textual analysis. The approach is used for interpreting text data with a predominantly naturalistic pattern. (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) In our study, the
empirical data is text data which is obtained from interviews. We, therefore, focused on the characteristic of language as communication and paid attention to the content itself as well as the contextual meaning. These are characteristics for qualitative content analysis, which is why we chose to use this approach in order to analyse our empirical data. (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005)

The aim of studies, which use the qualitative content analysis, is to deliver knowledge and an understanding of a studied phenomenon (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In this thesis, we were looking at the social phenomenon of different generations and their work relationships. We wanted to provide an understanding of how Millennials and Baby Boomers experience their leader-follower relationships between each other. We, therefore, needed to interpret the text data, which we collected through interviews, by using a systematic classification procedure of coding and the identification of patterns or themes. This approach is described as the qualitative content analysis. (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005)

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) define three approaches for the qualitative content analysis: Conventional, directed and summative. For our study, we chose the conventional content analysis, since its aim is to describe phenomena and this approach is suitable when only limited research literature on a phenomenon exists. (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) For our study, not much literature was found about the combination of generations and leader-follower relationships in workplaces. Consequently, we saw the conventional qualitative content analysis as suitable for our study.

Furthermore, we wanted to avoid a biased pre-understanding of the topic and therefore avoided using predetermined categories before collecting empirical data. Our aim is to emerge new insight from the data itself, which is described as the goal for studies who use the conventional qualitative content analysis. The generated knowledge and understanding we provide in this thesis is grounded on the unique perceptions of the participants. Using the conventional content analysis gave us the opportunity to develop concepts or models as the result of our thesis. (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005)

In order to analyse our data, we recorded all interviews to be able to listen to them again and make sure not to miss any information from the participants content as well as the contextual meaning. We first listened to all interviews again, following the categories of the participants in order to gain a sense of the whole in each interview category. For transcribing our empirical data, we listened to the audio-recordings again and transcribed the pertinent sections of the interviews, as it is described by Saunders et al. (2016). Afterwards, in the transcripts,
we highlighted the exact words which were used by the interviewees for capturing key thoughts and concepts. These varying thoughts led to the emerging of labels of codes, which reflect a summary of key thoughts. After that, the codes were put into categories depending on the relation and linkage of different codes. The categories help to cluster different codes in groups. (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) Saying it with the words of Graneheim and Lundman (2004), we looked at meaning units from the interviews and condensed as well as interpreted them with the underlying meaning. From that, we organised sub-themes and themes. (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004)

First, we followed this procedure to find themes within the different interview categories we had defined:

- Millennials as Leaders
- Baby Boomers as Followers
- Millennials as Followers
- Baby Boomers as Leaders

Secondly, we analysed the different themes in each interview category again and made linkages and relations between the different categories. In that way, we were able to find new themes and categories, which are related to the two leader-follower relationships we were looking at:

- Millennials as Leaders with Baby Boomers as Followers
- Baby Boomers as Leaders with Millennials as Followers

These emerged themes then formed the basis for answering our research question.

3.6 Scientific criteria
In studies such as this, reliability and validity are criteria which exist and are used in order to assess the quality of a study (Bryman, 2012). The criterion of reliability is a measure for replicability, which describes to what level a study can produce same results in case it is conducted again. In contrast to that, validity is used to evaluate the accuracy and quality of what is supposed to be measured in a study. (Bryman & Bell, 2011) Nevertheless, it is argued that these criteria are not appropriate for qualitative research since a qualitative research is characterised by subjectivity and consequently cannot be evaluated by reliability and validity. (Bryman, 2012) Guba and Lincoln (1985) propose trustworthiness and authenticity as
scientific criteria in qualitative research. The criteria of trustworthiness include the following: credibility, transferability, and conformability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). The criteria of authenticity are, by Bryman (2012), seen as thought-provoking and the opinions about the authenticity criteria - which are fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity and tactical authenticity - are controversial (Bryman, 2012). Due to this and the fact that some of these criteria are partially included in the conclusion of our study, we will not elaborate them further in this part of the thesis.

3.6.1 Credibility

Due to the fact that many social realities exist, depending on different social perspectives, in a study, it is important to make the reader accept the social reality of the researchers (Bryman, 2012). The scientific criterion of credibility evaluates how believable the findings of a study are. It describes, for example, the consistency between theoretical ideas and empirical information (Bryman & Bell, 2011). For our study, it, hence, concerns whether the fact of different generations has an impact on a leader-follower relationship or not.

One of the strategies, in order to raise the credibility of qualitative studies, is, according to Bryman and Bell (2012), member validation. For a member validation, all transcripts and summaries of the empirical data are given to the interview participants in order to double-check the interviewees understanding. (Bryman & Bell, 2012). Due to a limited timeframe for conducting our thesis, it was not possible for us to follow the process of member validation entirely. However, in order to avoid a misunderstanding of the given answers, we conducted our interviews in our and as well the interviewees’ native language. Furthermore, we asked follow-up questions for further explanations in order to avoid misunderstandings. Additionally, we did not want to conduct a full member validation, since it can lead to defensive reactions of the interview participants, who might want to reconsider some given answers (Bryman, 2012). However, we wanted to catch the initial thoughts of our interviewees, since these are the ones which initially influence a work relationship.

Another possible strategy to ensure credibility is, by Creswell (2013), described as prolonged engagement. With prolonged engagement, trust among the respondents should be raised and an understanding of their culture should be given. (Creswell, 2013) For our study, we already had pre-existing trust from our interviewees, since we knew them mostly from our private network. Additionally, during the whole research process, we were in close contact with the
interviewees, which also helped to gain their trust and to ensure honest and open responses from them.

3.6.2 Transferability

The scientific criterion of transferability is referred to the possible generalisation of the study results into another research context (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Due to a limited number of participants in qualitative studies, transferability is usually difficult to gain (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The phenomenon of multigenerational leader-follower relationships is a complex phenomenon that has unique characteristics, which is another aspect that made it difficult to ensure transferability in this study.

However, Guba and Lincoln (1985) argue that providing a rich and thick description of the study can ensure transferability. As Bryman (2012) describes, a thick description can provide a kind of database to the reader in order to allow them to do their own judgements if there is possible transferability of the findings (Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, despite the unique characteristics of a phenomenon, some patterns in the findings can most likely be transferred to other contexts as well. In order to provide a high level of transferability in our study, we offered the reader as much information as possible about the process of this study, including data collection and analysis. We made an effort to be as transparent and clear as possible in order to provide a great amount of information, which should make it possible to replicate the procedures of this thesis in a diverse context.

Moreover, George and Bennet (2005) describe, that transferability can be gained by preventing and detecting errors within the data collection process. This can be done due to a great variation of the dependent variable. (George & Bennet, 2005) Therefore, we chose interview participants with different backgrounds, different genders and from different industries. Although we knew most of the respondents beforehand, due to our personal network, we still were able to ensure a great diversity of the respondents. Especially for the German participants, we made sure Baby Boomers were from both, former East and West Germany because we knew depending on where they come from, they have experienced historical events differently. Additionally, since we are two authors who are writing this master thesis, we chose our interview participants from both of our personal networks to ensure a greater variance between the participants.
3.6.3 Dependability

The criterion of dependability is related to consistency and replicability of a study. It, therefore, refers to the verification of consistency between raw data and findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Bryman (2012) recommends an auditing approach to ensure dependability. With that approach, all records, problem formulations, transcripts and data analysis decisions are supposed to be kept and made accessible. However, it is also argued that it is not a persuasive approach and could be too demanding for auditors to process all supplied information. (Bryman, 2012)

Nevertheless, we kept all our data and notes as requested in the auditing approach, in order to make it possible for external peers to look into them when requested. Furthermore, since we are two authors who conduct this study, we were in constant discussions about possible interpretations of the findings and the procedures we used. Moreover, we had an external supervisor and peer reviews were conducted in forms of seminars and oppositions, which ensured constant feedback and demanding questions on our procedures and interpretations from external parties. (Bryman, 2012)

3.6.4 Confirmability

In qualitative studies, it is difficult to ensure complete objectivity, however, researchers can make sure and show that they act in good faith during the process of the study. It, therefore, should be noticeable that personal values and theoretical learnings did not influence the process of the study nor the findings from it. (Bryman, 2012) To enhance confirmability, we were constantly discussing potential misunderstandings and issues, prior, during and after the data collection. We critically questioned the way of conducting our interviews and the interpretations of the answers and evaluated needed alterations in order to improve the quality of our study. Additionally, we questioned each other when it came to possible interpretations and ideas and looked at the processes from varying perspectives. As mentioned before, some of the interview participants were chosen from our personal network. To avoid research bias, we ensured that the person who knew the interviewee less would conduct the interview.
4 Empirical Data and Analysis – What did we find out?

The following chapter provides an insight of all interview results and an analysis of the collected data. The first part reveals the conducted statements of our interview participants, while the second part includes our analysis and interpretation and presents nine areas of experience, which serve as the basis for answering our research question.

4.1 What did they tell us?

In the first part, the answers to our conducted interviews are presented. First, the results of the relationship when Millennials are leaders are shown, followed by the results of the relationship when Millennials are followers. In the first relationship, the interview answers are structured in a) Millennials as leaders and b) Baby Boomers as followers, while in the second relationship the collected data is constructed in a) Millennials as followers and b) Baby Boomers as leaders. In this part, we mention the number of participants who are making certain statements. We are not using that tool to measure our data quantitatively, we only use it in order to be able to evaluate the importance of each discussed topic.

4.1.1 Millennials as leaders with Baby Boomers as followers

a) Millennials as leaders

Importance in work, work values and expectations

When we asked Millennials, who are leaders in their workplace, what is important for them at work and what they expect from it, most of them said it is important to have a good atmosphere at work. They described having colleagues with whom they get along is necessary for them to ensure a good working climate and having fun at work. Some of the interviewees added, working together in teams and solving tasks together instead of alone is something they appreciate.

Furthermore, two of the four interviewees replied that they want to be flexible in their work. This includes flexibility related to working hours as well as flexibility and independency related to the content of work and decision-making process. Although most of the interviewed Millennials as leaders would work overtime in case it is needed, they also value a good work-life balance and the salary seemed not to play a major role in relation to their expectations
from work. Flexibility relating to the work itself means for the Millennials as leaders to bring in their own ideas and be able to make decisions by themselves.

All interviewees said, they want to have the possibility to get better in their jobs and want to continuously learn as well as be challenged in their work. The asked Millennials as leaders want their work to be interesting and appreciate changes in their daily work.

Two of the interviewees also pointed out their need to identify with the company they work for and the work itself. They said that the values of the company should go together with their own ones and that they want to stand behind the purpose of the work itself.

All of the asked Millennials as leaders said, it is important for them to be reliable and that they give their best at work. They want to get their work done and if necessary do not have a problem to do overtime. Even though they also want to have fun at work, getting their work done is their first priority.

Work experiences with other generations

When we asked Millennials as leaders about their experiences of working with other generations, all of them said that they have experienced working with other generations very differently depending on the mindset of the other person. All of them had an example of someone from the Baby Boomer generation who was very motivated, fun to work with and open towards people from another generation. These people usually showed a lot of respect towards the Millennials as leaders and seemed to be rather laid back and more open for private conversations as well. On the other hand, some of the interviewees had experienced working with someone from the Baby Boomer generation who seemed rather unmotivated and sceptical towards changes and younger generations. Nevertheless, the asked Millennials as leaders still expressed that they feel respected by colleagues of the Baby Boomer generation, although, in some cases, they felt that they first needed to prove themselves to the Baby Boomer generation.

Although the interviewees did not think some of the behaviours of people from the Baby Boomer can be related to their generation, most of them still said that they see rather differences between their generation and the Baby Boomer generation.

One topic, which was mentioned by all interviewed Millennials as leaders, was that colleagues from the Baby Boomer generation were not as familiar with technological issues as themselves or other colleagues of the Millennial generation. Furthermore, they described
people of the Baby Boomer generation as sometimes less open for changes in comparison to younger generations. Nevertheless, the asked Millennials as leaders always appreciated the long work experience of the Baby Boomer generation. Therefore, some of the interviewees described a learning relationship between them and the Baby Boomer generation.

Moreover, it was mentioned by a few of the interviewees, that they rather organize private events and that slightly more private conversations are hold at work with colleagues from their own generation.

One of the interviewed Millennials as leaders additionally mentioned his observation of different preferred leadership styles between the generations. He observed a preference of the Baby Boomers for a transactional leadership style instead of the transformational leading, which is nowadays more popular in his opinion.

**Work Relationships in leader-follower context**

When we asked the Millennials as leaders what they expect from work relationships, all of them replied immediately that respect is very important for them. They value respectful behaviour between team members as well as across different hierarchical levels. All of them said they want to be treated in a respectful way by their followers as they also want to treat them respectfully. One of the interviewees described that, in his team, the team members from time to time seem to forget that in the work place they have to contain professional relationships between team members and therefore lose the respectful behaviour with each other sometimes. However, after making a statement about this to his followers, they treat everyone in a respectful manner again and also show more respect towards him again.

Other aspects, which were mentioned by all interviewed Millennials as leaders, were, honesty and open communication. All of them expect their team members to be open and want a transparent work relationship. All interviewees especially want honesty when it comes to making mistakes. They want their team members to talk openly about mistakes and problems in order to work on a solution together. They want to ensure a team culture in which no one needs to be scared to admit mistakes. One of the interviewees even said he would rather like to introduce punishment for people who are not open about evolving problems. Furthermore, he added that he does not want people to be scared when they are called to a meeting with him. However, all interviewed Millennials as leaders were unsure if their followers always really practice the openness towards them. Related to openness and honesty, it was also mentioned that the interviewees want their followers, on one hand, to respect and accept their
decisions, however, on the other hand, also to question them in case they do not agree. One of the interviewees added that he appreciates to argue with his team members, as long as afterwards everyone can work well with each other again.

Three of the interviewed Millennials as leaders said that trust is important for them in work relationships. They expect trust from their followers and want to be able to trust them as well. The trust they are looking for is mostly related to work reliability and the competency of their followers. They expect that in a work relationship people can rely on each other. The interviewees were sure that they trust their followers, however, they were unsecure if their followers also have trust in them. Nevertheless, they did not have certain experiences related to missing trust, which is why they assumed to be trusted by their followers.

Three of the interviewees also pointed out that working as a team is important for them in work relationships. They described the importance of working together in order to solve problems and improve processes and results. Moreover, they want to achieve goals together as a team. One of the interviewees additionally mentioned that he, as the leader, has the same responsibility as his followers and therefore the best way is to work together as a team.

When asked about the expectations from work relationships, two of the interviewed Millennials as leaders mentioned what they expect from their followers related to the work itself as well. They said that it is important for them, every team member does the best in his or her job. They do not expect their followers to work without making any mistakes and they are also understanding in case someone cannot work to his or her full potential every day, however, it must be an exception and would not be tolerated by them in long-term.

Additionally, half of the interviewed Millennials as leaders pointed out that they expect independency from their team members in their work relationships. They explained that they only want to give their team members a framework for their work, however, the way their followers get their work done did not matter to them. They, furthermore, want their team members to be creative at work and contribute with their own ideas. Therefore, they try not to limit their followers within the work relationships. On the other hand, one of the interviewees also expects his followers to be able to individually take over responsibility whenever it is needed, without having to make them aware of it first.

The expectation of privacy within work relationships was only mentioned by two of the interviewed Millennials as leaders. One of them said that he does not need a private relationship to his team members and that the professional relationship has priority for him. However, with some team members he shares rather private relationships as well and with
some, the work relationship is only on a professional level. The second interviewee said she wants the team to have a good time together and therefore private relationships matter for her as well. With some team members, she has a close and rather friendship relationship. However, she also mentioned that in a leader-follower relationship it is more difficult to overcome a certain distance. The other two interviewees replied, after asking them especially about the intensity of their work relationships, they do not have private relationships with team members, however, especially on business events, private conversations occur to a large extent. Nevertheless, all interviewed Millennials as leaders mentioned that they have private conversations at work and in order to ensure a good working climate it is important for them that all team members get along well with each other. One of the interviewees pointed out, when spending half a day with some people it is important that a certain level of fun should exist in work relationships.

*Connection between Generation and leader-follower work relationship*

When making a connection between working with different generations and how the work relationships are perceived by the Millennials as leaders, most of the interviewees agreed that the relationship usually depends on the mindset of the team members who are from the Baby Boomer generation. The Millennials experience working together with people from the Baby Boomer generation who are very open to work with other generations and look forward to it, on the other hand, they also experience people from the Baby Boomer generation who do not take Millennials seriously in the workplace, due to less working experience.

Nevertheless, the Millennials felt they are accepted and respected by their followers who belong to the Baby Boomer generation. However, they feel as people from their own generation show even more respect towards them. One of the interviewees described that team members from their own generation need more feedback about their tasks while followers from the Baby Boomer generation work more independently. Although, one of the Millennials in the leader role explained that delegating tasks is in general not a problem with followers from the Baby Boomer generation, nevertheless, he expressed that in case of conflicts or if they have not done a job very well, he feels uncomfortable telling the Baby Boomers what they should do.

In order to gain more respect from followers who belong to the Baby Boomer generation, one of the interview participants mentioned that he is trying to adapt his leadership style accordingly to the followers he is working with. He explained that Baby Boomers seem to
respect him more when using a transactional leadership style and in cases of conflicts he raises his voice to remind his followers again that he is in the leading position.

Three of the Millennials told us that, when starting to work with someone from the Baby Boomer generation, they felt a rather sceptical behaviour towards them. One of the Millennials described that at the beginning he also felt uncomfortable to be the leader of people from the Baby Boomer generation. Another interview participant expressed his experience when he is leading interviews. He said, when having interviews with applicants from the Baby Boomer generation he gets the feeling they wonder how he can be in such a leading position already although he is from a younger generation. Nevertheless, when they see his competence in the job, the doubts seem to faint quickly, he explained. The same was expressed by two other interviewees, who said, by showing competence in their job, followers from the Baby Boomer generation seemed to have more respect and less doubts towards them.

All of the interviewed Millennials mentioned that people from the Baby Boomer generation are less affine to technology. The Millennials said, it is more difficult for Baby Boomers to use new technology and that they are furthermore less open to use them. In that sense, all four interviewees explained that they are teaching people from the Baby Boomer generation how to use it, which can also include explaining how to use a smartphone, as one of the interview participants described. However, sometimes teaching people from the Baby Boomer generation was described as being problematic, which, furthermore, can lead to difficulties in a team from time to time.

Another aspect, which was mentioned by all four interview participants in this category, was that the experience of the Baby Boomers influences their relationship to each other. They said that they are learning from the experience of the Baby Boomers and also ask them for advice from time to time.

In general, it was expressed by three of the four interviewees, that followers from the Baby Boomer generation are more sceptical when it comes to changes in the workplace. One of the Millennials said, at first Baby Boomers do not believe that something new is going to work and rely on how they have done things in the past. Two of the Millennials said that followers from the Baby Boomer rejected doing some tasks, because they did not know how to do it and were not interested in learning it. Nevertheless, it was also explained, by one of the interviewees, that once a change is done and younger colleagues are motivated about it, then people from the Baby Boomer generation usually also accept them and feel encouraged and inspired to be more open and creative as well.
However, one Millennial described a situation where team members from the Baby Boomer generation were more encouraged and motivated for a challenge than someone from the Millennials, because they had experienced similar difficult situations in their working life already and knew that things would work out. Nevertheless, one of the Millennials pointed out, for some projects he prefers working with people from his generation, because he feels they are more open for it.

Regarding the intensity of their relationships, all Millennials said that they have good relationships with followers from the Baby Boomer generation in general, however, they have more private conversations with people from their own generation at work. Nevertheless, only one Millennial said she meets other Millennials from work also outside of the workplace. She explained that in the relationship with Baby Boomers she has more the feeling of being colleagues. Two of the interview participants in this category pointed out, they do not think followers from the Baby Boomer generation want to meet outside of the workplace or are even interested in it, but they also admitted that they have not asked them either.

b) Baby Boomers as Followers

_Importance in work, work values, work ethics, expectations_

When we asked the Baby Boomers as followers about their expectations from their workplace and what is important for them, all four of them said, they value working in a good working atmosphere. They described, working well together and getting along with each other is significant for them in a workplace. One of the interview participants said, if the working climate is good, it almost does not matter what the work itself is. Another interviewee explained, for her it is important that colleagues talk with each other and participate together in the work. Collegiality is also expected by another interviewee. Furthermore, two of the interviewees mentioned that they want to have fun with each other in the workplace. Related to this aspect, two of the interview participants in this category replied that they additionally like private conversations at work, from time to time, however, one of them also said that doing many private things at work are not appreciated by her.

Moreover, two of the interview participants described honesty as an important factor in a workplace. As one interviewee described, she wants the discrepancy between, how something is and how something really is, to be as small as possible. Additionally, an “allowed mistake” culture is valued by her. Another interviewee stated, she does not want people to talk behind
her back, she prefers if people are open and open conversations are hold in which they can also make fun about something together.

Regarding the work itself, three of the four interview participants said, they want their work to be useful. Furthermore, two of them appreciate diversity in work and want to be challenged from time to time.

When asked about their work ethics, all of the interviewees said that they want to do their job well. However, the reactions towards the topic of overtime were different. One of the interviewees said she is open for overtime when it is needed. Another interviewee said, he does not want to do overtime, especially not if it is unpaid. Two of the interviewees, furthermore, said that their work ethics can vary due to either the behaviour of the boss or the degree of difficulty of the work itself. It was said, in case the challenge at work is too big, the interviewee feels unmotivated to do it.

**Work experiences with other generations**

When asked about their experience with other generations in the workplace, three of the four interview participants in this category replied that they like working with people from the Millennial generation. Two of them added that they enjoy working with Millennials sometimes more than with people from the Baby Boomer generation.

Regarding work ethics, all four interviewees said that they do not see any specific differences between their work ethics and the work ethics of the Millennials. Nevertheless, they still described differences between the two generations. Two of the interviewees described, Millennials seem to be happier and more fun and are more motivated than Baby Boomers. One of the Baby Boomers said, people from her own generation seem rather frustrated and exhausted. She also said that Millennials seem to be more relaxed at work and do not take everything too seriously. Baby Boomers in comparison take things, which are said by the boss, more serious in her opinion. She described that Baby Boomers have more sick days, perhaps due to their age, however, Millennials would, on the other hand, do more private things at the workplace, such as playing on the mobile phone or browsing the internet.

Another interviewee described, it is easier for her to work with younger people, than it was for her to work with older people when she was younger herself. She said she always had told herself never to stick too much to an old way of doing something as it was done by older colleagues when she was younger.
On the other hand, one of the interview participants expressed her experience that some Millennials seem more old-fashioned than some from the Baby Boomer generation. She explained that her generation, for example, was fighting for gender equality and same-sex couples in the past and that in her opinion some of the Millennials do have a greater scepticism towards these topics nowadays. However, she added that this could rather be related to personal characteristics instead of generational membership.

One of the four interview participants, in this group, described, he does not get along very well with his boss who is a Millennial. He said, he has the feeling the leader wants to keep him down and censures him in inappropriate ways.

Two of the Baby Boomers announced that Millennials are better in handling technology. However, one of them said that he still works more manually and does not want to change that.

**Work Relationships in leader-follower context**

When asked about what is important to them in a work relationship, all interview participants in this category replied that they want to get along with their colleagues and leaders. One of them said, she wants people at work to be happy with each other. Another one described, it is important that the people fit to each other, because if they do not get along well, their work will also not be good. In most cases the participants said that they are having a good relationship with their bosses, however, one expressed not getting along well with his boss but that the relationship is improving.

Three of four interview participants said that they want honesty and openness in a work relationship. One of them specifically said, she appreciates it if it is possible in a work relationship to express wishes and have discussions about a topic. She explained that in her leader-follower relationship it is possible to discuss a topic openly. However, in case the leader does not accept a request, she is sometimes unsure if the reason is that he does not want to fulfil it or if he cannot fulfil it. Another interviewee explained, he appreciates direct feedback in a work relationship, especially when it comes to the leader-follower relationship. He does not want people to talk behind his back. Additionally, he expects his team members to be able to receive direct feedback and have arguments without taking things that are said too serious.
Two of the Baby Boomers mentioned respect as an important aspect in a work relationship. Their preference is, to behave respectful with each other, however, without only showing respect to a leader, just because of the higher hierarchical level. They both explained that, in their leader-follower relationship, their boss looks at them from the same level, they feel their opinions are respected and, in turn, they respect the opinion of their leader as well.

Related to trust, one Baby Boomer said, she wants to avoid quick judging in a work relationship and prevent misunderstandings due to miscommunication. Another one described that she, moreover, wants her boss to be loyal to her first, before believing someone else.

Additionally, trust was mentioned by two of the interviewees. One of them said that she trusts her boss, however, she was unsure if her boss trusts her in the same way. She doubts it from time to time, because of questions her boss is asking her. Nevertheless, her leader shows loyalty towards her and in turn, she trusts in her leader’s competency. Another participant said, for him, it is too soon to be able to answer that he trusts his boss, after working with his leader for only half a year.

One of the Baby Boomers also expressed, helping each other out is important in a work relationship. That includes, for example, if someone has to work as a substitute for a sick colleague and has to handle a higher work load than usually, other colleagues should be aware of that situation and try to help out. She furthermore appreciates it as well when the leader is doing the same.

When it comes to the intensity of work relationships, one of the participants replied, she would meet her colleagues and leader for private events as well. Two other ones expressed that they usually do not have private relationships with their team members and leaders. One of them said, she never wanted to meet her colleagues privately. However, when work related events are organized, more private conversations would be hold.

**Connection between Generation and leader-follower work relationship**

Relating the topic of generation with the aspect of leader-follower relationships, three of the four interview participants in this category answered, they have a good relationship with their leaders who are from the Millennial generation. One of them described, the relationship with her boss is very professional and she feels supported by him. Another interviewee said, she appreciates it very much when her boss forwards the praise to the team members in case he receives any from the higher management level. She explained that her boss is very interested
in the work of his followers, which is appreciated by all team members. Additionally, it was explained by her, that it is possible to have reasonable discussions with her leader, in which he accepts arguments by the followers, which sometimes leads to reconsiderations of his previous decisions. In the Baby Boomer’s opinion, this was not the case with leaders from her own generation. Another Baby Boomer in a follower position replied, the motivation for her team is that everyone gets along very well. The good working atmosphere and the trust she and her leader share with each other encourages good work.

Although, most of the Baby Boomers stated they are having a good relationship with their leaders from the Millennial generation on a work basis, only one of them said that she also has a private relationship with her leader. Three of the Baby Boomers are having private conversations with their leaders, however, they do not meet the Millennials after work, even though they would be open for it. However, even the one Baby Boomer, who meets the Millennials after work, said, she does not need to do it very often, since they are from a different generation and the Millennials would probably not be interested in meeting her too often.

When we asked Baby Boomers as followers, in which way they think the different generation of their leader influences their work relationship, three of them replied, at the very beginning they had a feeling of scepticism or surprise when they met their leaders, because they are from a younger generation. One of the Baby Boomers said that she was very surprised to have a boss who is from the Millennial generation. However, her scepticism faded quickly when she started working with her boss, since he convinced her with his competences. Another Baby Boomer explained that she had an uncomfortable feeling towards her boss, at the beginning, when her boss started asking her about her work. She got the impression that her boss perhaps wanted to control her work and did not trust her. Nevertheless, it turned out that her boss was rather showing interest in her work and wanted to understand it better in order to learn from her. A third Baby Boomer described that his boss seemed to try too hard to prove himself as the leader. He explained the behaviour of his boss as sometimes unreasonably immature. Additionally, having a boss from the Millennial generation made him wonder what he had done over the last years if such a young person can be above him in the hierarchical structure. However, his boss is the son of the company’s CEO, which makes our interviewee believe that is the reason why his younger boss got in a leading position.

Two of the interview participants mentioned that they appreciate it when their leaders ask for advice. They replied, their leaders talk openly about the fact that the Baby Boomers have
more working experience and therefore like to ask them for their opinions or for help. One of them said, she likes it that her boss puts so much effort into learning from the followers. Another Baby Boomer replied that he would like his boss to be more honest about needing help for some decisions. However, his boss is rather pretending to know everything and that he does not need the help of his followers.

Nevertheless, the Baby Boomers also pointed out that Millennials seem to be more comfortable when it comes to the use of technology. One of the interviewees said that her boss wants to sensitize the team to work more technology based. In that way, she explained, she, as a Baby Boomer, is also learning from her boss as a Millennial.

Two of the Baby Boomers as followers mentioned, they prefer working with team members and leaders from the Millennial generation. They said that they seem to be happier, motivated and inspired than some people from their own generation, who make a rather frustrated and exhausted impression from time to time. Furthermore, they said leaders who are Millennials do not show much that they are in a higher hierarchical level, which motivates the Baby Boomers. Moreover, one of the Baby Boomers explained that she is rather scared of trying out new things, however, she said her leader encourages her to do new things and working like this gives her more drive and courage in the workplace. She commented, “Working with Millennials is a win.” (Ines, 2018).

When it comes to the topic of respect, three of the interviewed Baby Boomers experience a respectful behaviour between them and their leaders. However, one of them described that she does not take her boss as serious as she would if it was someone from her own generation, which does not mean that she is not following the decisions of her boss. However, she added, her boss is still very enthusiastic about the work, but she believes this optimism will fade after a while. The fourth interviewee replied that his boss is trying to gain his respect in unprofessional ways and through unreasonable decisions. Their relationship has suffered due to misunderstandings as well as miscommunication and his leader’s need of wanting to prove himself as the boss was criticised by our interview participant. The Baby Boomer assumed, his leader feels threatened by the great work experience he already has. Additionally, he assumes, his boss seems to feel more comfortable when he is surrounded with team members who are also from the Millennial generation.
4.1.2 Millennials as followers with Baby Boomers as leaders

a) Millennials as Followers

*Importance in work, work values, work ethics, expectations*

Concerning the first interview question, about their values and expectations from their workplace and how they observe their own work ethics, all four Millennials answered, being valued and appreciated by their leaders as well as colleagues is the most important part in their workplace. That includes feeling needed and valued in what they do. One interview participant answered, being valued means to be involved in processes, new projects and decision-making. It is important to him that the leader shows interest in his opinion, thoughts are valued and his voice is being appreciated for developing new ideas.

A common topic, which all four Millennials pointed out, was their need for being trusted. They answered, it is important to them that their leader stands behind them, gives them freedom in their own decision-making and lets them decide on their own how to solve problems. One Millennial described this as being “led on a long leash”. Being trusted in doing reasonable and professional decisions on their own seems to be necessary for all four Millennials.

Being trusted also leads to being happy in a workplace. All four Millennials answered, they want to feel happy in their workplace and want to like to go to work. Two Millennials additional said, being happy also means being interested in what they do at work and having challenging work tasks.

Concerning work ethics, all four interview participants said, they consider themselves as having good work ethics, which means being motivated and engaged in their work. Nevertheless, they all agree that they are only motivated and engaged if they feel appreciated and valued by their leader and colleagues. All four Millennials said, they are willing to do overwork as well as work for what they are usually not responsible, as long as the leader does not take them for granted and appreciates their engagement. Two participants mentioned that they do unpaid work from home to prepare for work if they did not have enough time during their working hours.

Three Millennials pointed out that one of the most important parts of work is the work climate with colleagues and the leader. Getting along with each other, sharing the same goals, having good discussions and an open communication are what they mentioned in relation to a good work environment.
Two in four Millennials also pointed out that they do not want too much hierarchy between themselves and their leader in a workplace. One interview participant mentioned that he does not want a leader who thinks too high of him- or herself and acts as he or she is up there and the teachers in his workplace are down here and below them, there are the cleaners. This kind of hierarchy would not be appreciated by him. The second Millennial said, she rather wants to have a collaborative workplace where every team member is treated equally and where it is not repeatedly mentioned who the leader and who the subordinate is.

Work experiences with other generations

When we asked about their experiences in working with other generations, three Millennials responded that they had both good as well as bad experiences, while one Millennial only has positive experiences in his workplace so far. However, they all mentioned that these experiences often depend on the personality of the leader.

The reason why they partly had negative experiences, was due to the rigid thinking and mindsets of several Baby Boomers with whom they work or used to work. Three interview participants mentioned that some Baby Boomers are not willing to do changes and still work as they did 20 years ago. For example, it was mentioned that Baby Boomers are not as open to changes as Millennials when it comes to working processes. They often use phrases such as: “We have always done it like this”, “This is how we do it” and “Why should we do it different now”.

One Millennial experienced differences in expectations and performance capabilities between his and the Baby Boomer generation. Another Millennial said, he experienced differences between his and the Baby Boomer generation in relation to their work ethics. He feels that Baby Boomers rather focus on their own share and only take their own responsibilities, while Millennials are more open to help out their colleagues and take on responsibilities which have not been theirs in the first place.

Two of four Millennials mentioned that they experience the work with Baby Boomers in a positive way. They responded that those Baby Boomers are very interested in the younger generation, especially in what Millennials do in their free time and what their way of thinking is. Those Baby Boomers are open to a new way of thinking as well as appreciate what Millennials contribute to the workplace from their newly received education. Our interview participants discussed that these Baby Boomers are willing and accepting to adapt to the changes which Millennials bring into the workplace. However, this also happens the other
way around. All four interview participants commented that they can learn a lot from the Baby Boomer generation, especially from their experiences and their routines.

*Work Relationships in leader-follower context*

Two out of three Millennials responded, they expect honesty in a work relationship. One of them said, she would want her colleagues to be honest and rather talk to her about issues instead of talking behind her back. Three out of the four interviewees also mentioned that openness is very important to them in a work relationship. They want to be able to say what is on their mind and expect the same from their colleagues. That also involves being open to questions and to discuss topics instead of avoiding talking to each other.

Two Millennials pointed out that they expect from either side of a work relationship to have positive, appreciative and accepting attitudes towards each other. One of them also added that it is important to respect each other when having a work relationship.

All four Millennials stated that they expect the other person in a work relationship to listen to them. Especially when it comes to a leader-follower relationship they expect their leader to guide and support them in what they need and therefore listen to their requests and needs. One Millennials mentioned, he wants his leader to listen to his new ideas and to support him in transforming them into reality, which he views as being open to changes and developments.

Another important aspect, which all four Millennials pointed out, is their expectation of learning from each other in a work relationship. They appreciate working with other generations, because that means combining each other’s strengths which they see as a great fortune for a workplace.

What all four Millennials especially expect from their leader in a work relationship, is, to show interest in their team and being present in the workplace. That includes being part of the workforce and being interested in what is going on in the team. Two Millennials added that they want their leader to trust in them and give them freedom by letting them make their own decisions. They expect their leader to encourage them in being self-sufficient, but at the same time giving advice if they need it.

Three of four interview participants in this category answered that their work relationship with their leader is as they expect it to be. Their leaders listen to them, they have a positive attitude and drive and they make things happen, which is very much appreciated by the Millennials. Two Millennials added, their leader involves him- or herself and participates in
the team, which they value to a large extend. One Millennial responded, due to giving her responsibilities, she assumes that her leader trusts in her abilities. She also added that their yearly employee meetings give her a great opportunity to talk openly about herself, her wishes and her expectations towards her leader and herself.

Two Millennials responded, their leader motivates them as well as supports, gives advice and secures them if they do mistakes. One of them added, he knows his leader has his back and stands behind him if he does something wrong. That makes him feel save and is one reason why he views his work relationship to his leader as very positive.

When it comes to the intensity of their work relationship to their leader, three Millennials said they get along very well and do activities together outside of work. These activities include having Christmas dinners with the whole team, having a coffee after work or going for drinks in the evenings with the team sometimes. They all said, they like that they can not only talk about work but also about their private life.

Two out of four Millennials said the relationship with their leader is not considered to be a friendship but it is on a private level which they appreciate. For example, they meet each other after work with their colleagues, have dinner and talk about their lives, even though they are from different generations. One Millennial though answered, he experiences his work relationship with other Millennials different than with Baby Boomers. With Millennials, he feels more relaxed and they talk about their private lives while with Baby Boomers their relationship is only based on work.

Two Millennials explicitly pointed out, the fact that their leader is so good in their job makes the workplace a happy place and facilitates the work.

However, one Millennial mentioned that he experienced good as well as bad work relationships with leaders of the Baby Boomer generation. His negative experiences include, his leader not involving herself in the team, not showing interest in her workforce and not knowing what is going on in the workplace. He mentioned, his leader is constantly shutting down her office door and by doing so, she shows her team they are not welcome there. His leader did not listen to her team and the people who are below her, but rather listened to the people above her. He did not experience trust from either side of that work relationship. They had minimum communication and he personally avoided talking to his leader as much as he could, which he was very unhappy about.
Connection between Generation and leader-follower work relationship

Two Millennials answered to the question, how “generation” influences their leader-follower work relationship, they feel the relationship to their leaders work so well because, even though they are from the Baby Boomer generation, their way of thinking has changed and they adapted to the way how Millennials are thinking today. The interview participants value the open attitude of their leaders and responded that their leaders are very welcoming to the Millennials’ thinking.

All four Millennials pointed out that it is a big enrichment to work with the Baby Boomer generation, because they can learn from each other. Three interview participants mentioned that they can learn from their leader’s experiences such as from the routines their leaders have and from their leader’s tips on how to express oneself as well as how to talk to parents in a teacher-parent meeting. All four Millennials were convinced that the different talents of their generation and the Baby Boomer generation is a big advantage in a workplace. One Interviewee explained that they split their tasks in the workplace well, he does all presentations with power point while his leader gives him tips on how to communicate with customers and act in situations when difficulties occur. He added that his leader gives all tasks, which have to do with technology, to the Millennials in the company.

Two of four Millennials were so convinced of being greatly influenced by their leaders, who are from the Baby Boomer generation, they are unsure if they would accept their leader as much as they do now, if he or she would be from the same generation. One Interviewee mentioned, he thinks he would not have as much respect for the leader as he does in his work relationship now.

Two Millennials also pointed out, their work relationship to their leader was influenced due to the fact that they are from a different generation, because when they started working they were worried about their leader not accepting and respecting them as much as older colleagues. They were afraid their leader would be prejudiced about their thinking and how they act because of their generation. However, when they worked together for a longer time it turned out that their leaders always trusted them and accepted their way of thinking. One Millennial mentioned that he recognizes his leader trusts him because he gets more and more responsibilities the longer he is working there and the better they know each other.

One interview participant mentioned, he has the feeling his leader sometimes understands colleagues, who are also Baby Boomers, better than the Millennials. He is sure that the “generation” would not influence the work relationship if the Baby Boomer as a leader would
be open for changes and be aware that changes are necessary. However, if the Baby Boomer as a leader is not aware of that, then, the fact that they are from different generations does have a negative influence on their work relationship. He experienced some Baby Boomers often do not act upon what they agreed in previous discussions, which makes its sometimes difficult to work with each other.

One Millennial had the experience that it is easier to combine their ideas and create something new with other Millennials, because his Baby Boomer as a leader is often set in her own way of doing things, which makes it difficult to come up with a collective way of doing the work. Another interview participant said, he has the feeling his leader approaches work tasks differently than him, which has an influence on the work itself, but not directly on their work relationship.

b) Baby Boomers as leaders

**Importance in work, work values, work ethics, expectations**

Concerning the first interview question, all four Baby Boomers said it is important to them to work cooperatively and well together in their team. They all value a good and productive work climate, where all team members trust and respect each other.

Three of the interview participants in this category mentioned that money is not as important to them anymore as feeling comfortable in their workplace. They answered, rather wanting to have fun at work instead of earning a lot of money. One of them even added, his work is more a mission to him than a job to earn money. However, one Baby Boomer pointed out that earning money is one important factor in his work.

Three interview participants responded that they are goal oriented and being successful in their workplace is significant for them. They mentioned that success to them is if their customers are satisfied and happy, which is one of their biggest goal to achieve in their work.

One of the interview participants in this category assesses herself as still being ambitious and diligent, even though she already works for such a long time of her life.

Another one of the four interview participants also replied that he thinks it is necessary for a workplace to go with changes such as new developments and technology and that other Baby Boomers should also adapt to these changes.
Work experience with other generations

Two of four Baby Boomers in this category are convinced that giving Millennials freedom and challenging work makes them work well together. They said it is important as a leader to motivate Millennials in the right way and that Millennials are differently motivated than Baby Boomers. One interview participant experienced that Millennials are motivated through money, free time, recognition and appreciation. Another interviewee added that he motivates Millennials by giving them positive feedback as well as challenging work tasks.

One Baby Boomer answered that he listens to and openly approaches his team members of the Millennial generation, because he believes in them and their skills. All Baby Boomers pointed out that they are sure both generations can learn from each other in the workplace. Two of four Baby Boomers replied that, through their yearlong experiences, they see themselves as guides and coaches for the Millennials in their workplace.

Two of four Baby Boomers evaluate Millennials as the ones who still want to work, are funny, bring new life into the workplace, have new ideas and are all about digitalization. One of them added, Millennials are much more internationalized than his generation was at that age. The Millennials generation keep contact with people from all over the world through social media, because they grew up with those technological developments. People from his generation are not as much about social media and technology as Millennials are. Another interview participant experiences that Millennials have a different perception of and expectation from their work than his generation. He is convinced that they, for example, expect more work life balance and value free time more than making a lot of money. He also experiences his generation as being much more set in their attitudes and mindsets.

Two of four Baby Boomers pointed out that the work with Millennials in general is good, however, sometimes they face difficulties in their work with them. Both Baby Boomers assess some Millennials as being self-absorbed and not having the will to work longer if it is needed. One of them added that Millennials often only look for their own advantage and get the best for themselves, instead of watching out what is the best for the team.

Work Relationships in leader-follower context

Two Baby Boomers in this category expect honest communications in their work relationships with their team members, which includes talking openly about problems and
being honest about having done a mistake. Two of the interview participants also said, they value if their team members embody what they say and follow the rules.

Due to their own engagement and goal orientation, two of four Baby Boomers pointed out that they expect their team members to also engage themselves in the workplace and being goal oriented. One of the interviewees also added that he wants others to show him respect in their work relationship.

Two Baby Boomers replied that they expect their team members to make their own decisions, be able to work independently and be willing to do the tasks which they are supposed to do. One of them added, it is important to her that her team members evaluate themselves when it is necessary to ask her for advice and when it is inappropriate to do so.

All four Baby Boomers spoke about how much they value getting along with each other in a team, being cooperative and having an overall good work climate in a workplace. One of them added, it is most important to him that he has nice people around him who make it worth going to work every day. Another interviewee mentioned, she wants her team members to be good to each other without bullying anyone. A third Baby Boomer pointed out that he wants everyone in the team to be fair to each other, which includes not seeking his attention by telling what others in the team did wrong, he instead rather wants them to focus on themselves and their own work.

All four Baby Boomers responded that the relationship to their team members mostly runs smooth and well, but sometimes it doesn’t go as they expect it. Especially in the relationship with Millennials, one commented that they have different views than him, which raises difficulties and certainly challenges him in some situations. Another Baby Boomer added, she experiences difficulties with team members who think they do not have to follow rules and rather surf in the internet instead of working, which then makes them fall behind with their work tasks. A third interviewee mentioned, he gives his team members a lot of flexibility, which he then expects to get back. However, especially Millennials do not always do that and rather take and not give back. Again, another Baby Boomer replied, if things do not go as he expects, he has to have employee meetings and be clear about what goes wrong, which usually has a positive effect on the attitudes of his team members.

One interview participant in this category is convinced that different generations have to adjust to each other in a leader-follower work relationship and must try to understand the other side as well as make compromises towards each other in order to work well together.
When it comes to the intensity of their leader-follower relationship, one Baby Boomer mentioned she likes to be on a personal level with her team members and talk about their private lives, even though that doesn’t include meeting each other outside of work, while another interviewee mentioned he does not necessarily have to talk about their private lives or do anything with his team members after work.

*Connection between Generation and leader-follower work relationship*

When it comes to the influence of “generation” on their leader-follower relationship, two of four Baby Boomers in this category are convinced that each generation needs another generation to give each other stability in order to be successful in a workplace. Especially Baby Boomers need Millennials to grow personally and adjust better to changes. One replied, everything in the workplace is better to do together, which leads to better results. The other one added, the different knowledges and talents of Baby Boomers and Millennials combine well together in one workplace.

All four Baby Boomers replied, having Millennials in a team also means the opportunity to learn from each other. The experiences of Baby Boomers combined with the new thinking and ideas of Millennials complete each other well, which creates a good learning atmosphere for everybody involved. One interview participant mentioned that discussions with Millennials makes his generation richer in their knowledge and expands their horizon. However, another interviewee is convinced that in general Millennials can learn more from her than the other way around. Even though this interview participant also responded that she learns about technology from Millennials, while they learn from her more about working processes. Considering this aspect, another Baby Boomer pointed out a different opinion and therefore said, he thinks his generation can learn much more from Millennials than the other way around. He respects and believes that Millennials bring great knowledge in the workplace.

Two of the four interviewees responded, they are very open-minded about the Millennial generation, they want to get to know them and they expect the same in return. One of them added, if his generation treats Millennials with respect and is interested in them as well as their mindset, then he experiences a great working climate. He is convinced that involving Millennials in processes and important work, make them feel appreciated and happy.

Considering the last interview question, one Baby Boomer explained, when he was young the older generation didn’t notice his younger generation much, they rather gave his generation advice from above and used phrases such as ‘You are young, you still need to learn that’ and
‘You don’t know this yet’. In his opinion, at that time they didn’t really see the knowledge flow in the young generation. He commented that the attitudes of older generations have shifted nowadays and Baby Boomers value Millennials much more, are understanding towards that young generation and actually see potential in them. In his opinion, Baby Boomers do not think they are always right just because they have more experiences than Millennials. He thinks that has to do with digitalization, because Millennials know much more about new technologies and developments and, hence, are offering necessary knowledge for the workplace.

In the work relation with Millennials, one Baby Boomer explained, they treat her differently than her team members from the same generation do. There was more distance between them when Millennials started working at her workplace. In that context, she also added that she treats Millennials different than Baby Boomers in her team. She motivates Millennials much more and gives them feedback more frequently, because she wants them to feel comfortable at the workplace. She has high hopes in the young generation and does this due to her aspiration to not lose Millennials from the workplace.

Two other Baby Boomers also see Millennials as a chance for workplaces, because they are just starting their work life and that is why they should get opportunities to evolve and take over the workplaces eventually. Moreover, it is nice to work with Millennials, because they are full of energy and bring fun into the workplace.

Three of four interview participants in this category are sure that it is easier for Millennials to handle the fast operations nowadays. Digitalization does not seem to be a problem or barrier for Millennials, because they grew up with it, which makes them better experts in this aspect than their own generation.

One Baby Boomer responded, it seems to him as Millennials sometimes take less responsibility for society and rather more for themselves, which indirectly affects his relationship with them, because this behaviour does not correspond with his values. He added that he experiences Millennials as sometimes not being understanding about the fact that Baby Boomers are not as physically fit as they are. Instead of accepting it, they rather use that as their advantage, which in his opinion has a very negative effect on the relationship between those two generations.

When mentioning the intensity of the relationship between themselves and the Millennial generation, two of four Baby Boomers commented, they do not do anything privately after work with team members of the other generation. Another interview participant explained, in
his team, they do a fieldtrip once a year, which has a positive influence on the team dynamic, because during that activity they get to know each other much better. That is also a good way how the Millennials in his team lose their fear for the Baby Boomer generation. Baby Boomers in return get to know the Millennials, their personality traits and their different thinking approaches, which gives them a whole new view about Millennials in a positive way and helps a lot with understanding each other better in their work.

4.2 What does it mean?

Based on the collected empirical data, we came up with nine areas of experience which, according to our findings, matter between Millennials and Baby Boomers within leader-follower relationships. These nine areas are shown in Figure 3. For each area of experience, we comprise the results of our collected data and describe them related to the two relationships we are looking at:

a) Millennials as leaders with Baby Boomers as followers
b) Baby Boomers as leaders with Millennials as followers

Figure 3: Areas of experience in multigenerational workplaces

Source: Created by the authors
Honesty/ Open Communication

a) All interviewed Millennials as leaders as well as interviewed Baby Boomers as followers value honesty and open communication in their leader-follower relationships. The Millennials expressed this wish for openness and honesty from their followers, especially when it comes to admitting mistakes and having reasonable argumentations with the Baby Boomers. In contrast, Baby Boomers value openness more in connection to feedback, which is given by their leaders as well as received by them. However, both parties expressed, having a few doubts about the openness and honesty from the other party, even though both Millennials and Baby Boomers expect it from each other. Baby Boomers experience it negatively when there is a great lack of honesty and open communication between them and their leaders. Therefore, misunderstandings and miscommunications sometimes appear in the relationship, which were described as having a negative effect on the leader-follower relationship.

b) The Millennials as follower experience honesty in their work relationship with their leaders of the Baby Boomer generation when they have open communications, are able to say what is on their mind and when issues are being discussed openly instead of behind someone’s back. In turn, the Baby Boomers also expect honest communications in their work relationships with their followers, which includes talking openly about problems, following the rules and being honest about having done a mistake. While the interviewed Millennials expect their leaders to listen to them, in turn, we assume the Baby Boomers therefore make open communications possible, because they claim to listen to their followers and openly approach them if problems occur. However, some Millennials do not experience open communications in their leader-follower work relationship, because they feel as their leader does not listen to them. Millennials also value the opportunity of having employee meetings, which they see as good ways of expressing themselves openly and talking about wishes and expectations in relation to themselves and their leaders. In comparison, the Baby Boomers in a leading position of our study experience the effect of employee meetings positively when things do not go as they expect and they have to have clear discussions about what goes wrong and how to improve that.
Work climate

a) Both, Millennials as leaders and Baby Boomers as followers expressed that a good work climate is important for them in a leader-follower relationship. For a good work climate, both parties said that getting along well with each other, having fun and working as a team is appreciated by them. Millennials especially pointed out that they appreciate solving problems as a team and Baby Boomers said, in contrast, feeling supported by their leader is appreciated by them. Additionally, Baby Boomers experience that they feel more motivated to work well when a good work climate is provided. Both, Millennials as leaders and Baby Boomers as followers experience mostly very good work climates when working with each other. Millennials described that they experience good relationships with Baby Boomers as their followers when the Baby Boomers are open towards them, motivated and rather laid back. These Baby Boomers are, according to the Millennials’ opinions, also the ones who show most respect towards them. In case a Millennial described a bad experience with a Baby Boomer, it was mostly explained that these Baby Boomers seemed not to be open to work with Millennials and made, in general, a rather frustrated and exhausted impression. Some of the interviewed Baby Boomers experience leader-follower relationships with Millennials in such a good way that they prefer working with Millennials instead of Baby Boomers. The interviewed Baby Boomers appreciate about the Millennials that they seem more fun to work with, more open, more motivated and encouraging than co-workers from their own generation. It can be seen that Baby Boomers as well as Millennials experience good work climates in a leader-follower relationship when the other party is characterised by an open and motivating mindset. Furthermore, Baby Boomers experience the relationship with their leaders on a professional level, however, they also have the feeling Millennials as leaders think less in hierarchical structures, which was described as having a positive effect on the work climate.

b) Millennials experience their work better when having a good work climate, which includes getting along with each other, sharing the same goals and having good discussions. In their work relationship with Millennials, Baby Boomers also experience a good work climate when working cooperatively and well together in the team. Both generations mentioned, a good work climate for them is, when they feel comfortable in their workplace and team members trust and respect each other as well as are kind, collegial and have positive attitudes towards others. Based on the replies of our study, it seems as both generations experience a good work climate
climate, when everyone is mutually treated fair and equally. Millennials also experience a good work climate when the relationship between them and their leader is not too hierarchical in a workplace. In their opinion, the work climate is negatively affected if Baby Boomers as leader distance themselves too much from their follower due to their hierarchical higher position.

Mindset towards change

a) The interviewed Millennials as leaders expressed that they appreciate flexibility in their workplace, including flexible working hours and decision-making processes. Some of the interviewed Baby Boomers as followers, in contrast, replied that they want diversity at work and be challenged from time to time. The Millennials described experiences regarding the topic of change, in which their followers seem to be inflexible, sceptical towards change and occasionally refuse to work on a certain task, since it is different to what the Baby Boomers are used to. This goes in line with the responses of some Baby Boomers who mentioned, their motivation decreases in case a task is too challenging. Furthermore, sometimes Baby Boomers seem to be scared of trying out new things. Millennials as leaders observed that some of their followers who were at the beginning sceptical about changes, were, after a while, more open about it when they realized the advantages of it. Some of the Baby Boomers as followers experience a needed encouragement from their leaders, in order to be more open towards changes. Nevertheless, Millennials have also experienced working together with Baby Boomers who appreciate change and are motivated to try out new things, due to having an open mindset.

The greatest area of change, in which Millennials as well as Baby Boomers have mentionable experiences, is the change towards more digital workplaces. Baby Boomers have experienced difficulties with it, while some Millennials said it can be difficult to teach Baby Boomers the use of technology and it is a reason for them to rather choose project members from their own generation.

b) For Millennials as followers, it is sometimes difficult and challenging to work with Baby Boomers, due to their set thinking and mindset. The Millennials in our study feel as it is sometimes easier to combine their ideas and create something new with other Millennials, because Baby Boomers as leaders are often set in their own way of doing things, which makes it difficult to come up with a collective way of doing the work. Millennials as followers
experience leaders of the Baby Boomer generation as having different expectations, performance capabilities and work ethics, which indirectly influences their work relationship. They experience that some Baby Boomers are not willing to do changes and still work as they did many years ago. Negative experiences are encountered by Millennials when Baby Boomers do not adapt to changes and accept the “new” thinking of today. These changes are mostly about technology and new developments. Even though Baby Boomers are aware they are not as familiar with digitalization and technology as Millennials, some of them are still convinced their generation has to go along with changes and adapt to new developments. Baby Boomers rather give tasks, which have to do with technology, to the Millennials in the workplace. However, change is also experienced positively, especially by Baby Boomers who evaluate Millennials as the ones who are fun to work with, bring new life into the workplace and have many new ideas.

Learning from each other

a) The work relationship between Millennials as leaders and Baby Boomers as followers was described as a learning relationship by participants of both parties. Millennials experience that they are more comfortable in using technologies than the Baby Boomers, while Baby Boomers, on the other hand, have the feeling that their work experience is appreciated by the Millennials. The interviewed Millennials as leaders mentioned that teaching Baby Boomers how to use technology can be difficult and not everyone is open for it and willing to learn it. Baby Boomers in contrast experienced openness from the Millennials towards their greater work experience and observed that Millennials are asking about it and willing to learn from it. However, Baby Boomers as followers have also experienced working with leaders who are not admitting of needing help which has influenced the leader-follower relationship in a negative way.

b) Both, Millennials as followers as well as Baby Boomers as leaders experience learning from each other in their work relationship. While Millennials rather learn from the Baby Boomer’s experiences, routines and working processes, they, in turn, learn more from the “new” thinking, newly received education and ideas of Millennials as well as about technology and digitalization. All interview participants in this category were convinced that the two generations, with their different strengths and talents, need and combine with each other in a workplace in order to grow and be successful. When Millennials and Baby Boomers
work together, a great learning atmosphere can be created. Due to their yearlong experiences, Baby Boomers as leaders are seen as guides and coaches for Millennials as followers from whom they learn much about work life in general. The Baby Boomers as leaders in our study have different experiences when it comes to which generation learns more from the other one. Some of them feel as Millennials learn more from their generation than the other way around and others think they can learn much more from the Millennial generation.

**Appreciating each other**

a) Within the leader-follower relationship with Millennials as leaders and Baby Boomers as followers, none of the parties mentioned the topic of appreciating each other during the interviews. However, although the Baby Boomers as followers did not mention that they have the need of being appreciated by their leaders, they experience it positively when their leaders show interest and appreciation in their work. Additionally, the Baby Boomers are happy to have leaders who forward praise to their followers.

b) In the relationship between Millennials as followers and Baby Boomers as leaders, one of the most important aspects, which our interview participants pointed out, is appreciating each other. Millennials feel appreciated and recognized by their leaders, if Baby Boomers in contrast realize these needs and are convinced of that, in order to work well together. They have to give the younger generation appreciation, attention, respect as well as be interested in them and their thoughts. We also found out that in order to be motivated, Millennials as followers positively experience being listened to, being engaged in processes and being valued by their leaders. We discovered that most Baby Boomers are aware of these needs, due to the mentioned experiences of our interview participants, who are able to motivate Millennials when giving them challenging work, recognition and appreciation. Millennials as followers also pointed out that they positively value their leaders, whom involve themselves in the team and are present in the workplace. In our study, Baby Boomers as leaders are interested in the Millennials at their workplace and involve themselves in the leader-follower relationship. Nevertheless, Baby Boomers sometimes feel less appreciated and understood by Millennials when it comes to their physical ability, which, from the Baby Boomers’ point of view, can have a negative effect on their relationship.
Respect

a) In the work relationship with Millennials as leaders and Baby Boomers as followers, both, Millennials and Baby Boomers appreciate respect towards each other. The interviewed Millennials also pointed out that they value respectful behaviour among all team members. The interviewed Baby Boomers mentioned that they do not show respect towards their leaders just because of hierarchical reasons. Baby Boomers experience leaders who treat them very respectfully without showing that there are differences on the hierarchical levels. Related to that, they also appreciate the experience when leaders listen to their opinions and reconsider decisions based on the Baby Boomers arguments.

The interviewed Millennials as leaders expressed that they feel respected by Baby Boomers in general, although they feel even more respected by followers who are from the Millennial generation. They have no negative experiences when it comes to delegating tasks towards Baby Boomers, however, they have, from time to time, experienced a lack of respect from their followers at the very beginning of their work relationships. It was mentioned that they feel the urge to prove themselves when starting to work with Baby Boomers as followers. Additionally, when it comes to conflicts at the workplace, Millennials might experience some hesitation in their own leading behaviour. Nevertheless, Millennials also experience working together with Baby Boomers as followers, who show respect towards them from the very beginning. These Baby Boomers were mostly described as being very open personalities in general. In order to gain more respect from their followers, Millennials experience positive effects when they try to adapt their leadership style to the one which their followers prefer. Furthermore, asking their followers for help and advice seems to affect the aspect of respect positively as well from the Millennials point of view. However, Baby Boomers also experience leaders who try to gain their trust in inappropriate ways, by punishing them for unreasonable reasons for example. This can lead to a lack of trust towards the Millennials as leaders.

b) In the work relationship between Millennials as followers and Baby Boomers as leaders, respect was not mentioned as one of the main areas of experience. While Millennials as followers rather expect respecting each other in a work relationship, Baby Boomers as leaders mentioned, they expect their followers to show respect to them. However, Millennials as followers seem to have more respect towards their leaders if they are from the Baby Boomer generation than if they were from their own generation. Millennials as follower experience
being positively influenced by their Baby Boomers as leaders and therefore value their leader-follower relationship as it is.

Trust

a) Both Millennials as leaders and Baby Boomers as followers expressed that trust is important for them in their leader-follower relationship. They both want to have trust and want to be trusted. The interviewed Millennials as leaders want to ensure a trustful relationship in which no one is scared to admit mistakes. Additionally, Millennials want to rely on their followers and rather give them flexibility at work. Baby Boomers appreciate loyalty from their leaders. Both parties said that they experience trust towards the other party, however, both also mentioned that, from time to time, they are unsure if their leader or follower trusts them as well. Nevertheless, none of them has negative experiences, which does not prove their feeling of not being trusted sometimes.

b) Trust is an area of experience which Millennials as followers mentioned in their interview, but seemed to be not as important to Baby Boomers as leaders, whom did not address this topic in the interview. However, we assume the Baby Boomers as leaders in our study trust their Millennials as followers, because they do expect them to work independently and make their own decisions about their work. The Millennials in our study, on the other hand, experience trust in relation to their leader positively as well as negatively. Due to assigning them responsibilities, Millennials assume their leaders trust in them and their abilities. Millennials experience trust in relation to their leader, because they know their leader has their back and stands behind them if they do mistakes, which positively influences their work relationship to their leader. On the other hand, when Baby Boomers as leaders constantly shut down their office door and show their team that they are not welcome, then Millennials as followers do not experience trust from either side of their work relationship. Not experiencing trust in their work relationship also influences the communication with their leader negatively, which makes Millennials unhappy in their workplace.

Intensity of Relationship

a) When it comes to the intensity of the work relationships, both, Millennials as leaders and Baby Boomers as followers had different opinions about it. In both generations people
answered, they do not need private relationships with their followers or leaders, some did not want it at all, some said having private conversations at the workplace are enough and some said they appreciate closer relationships to leaders or followers. Based on the answers in our interviews, it can be seen that, although both generations have the same varying opinions about the intensity of work relationships, Millennials seem more likely to experience closer relationships to team members. This includes private conversations at work as well as meetings outside of work. However, in case they are having a closer relationship to a follower, it would usually be someone who is also from the Millennial generation. Both also said, during the interviews, that Millennials as leaders and Baby Boomers as followers have doubts if the other generation would even be interested in having a more private relationship with them.

b) There are differences to recognize when it comes to the intensity of the relationship between Millennials and Baby Boomers. Millennials as followers get along with their colleagues very well, having a relationship also on a private level and do activities together outside of work. The Baby Boomers as leaders in our study, on the other hand, do not meet their followers of the Millennial generation privately. It seems as Millennials as follower value much more being on a private level with their leaders than the other way around. Baby Boomers as leaders as well as Millennials as followers, both, experience their work relationship with leaders or followers from the other generation different than with the ones of their own generation. The Millennials feel more relaxed and talk more about their private lives with other Millennials, while their relationship with Baby Boomers is more about work. The Baby Boomers as leaders recognize that Millennials treat them differently, while at the same time they also behave differently towards Millennials than towards members of their own generation. Therefore, especially Baby Boomers experience more distance between them and Millennials in their leader-follower relationship, while the Millennials have the feeling other Millennials sometimes understand them better than Baby Boomers.

Preconceptions

a) In the beginning of each work relationship between Millennials as leaders and Baby Boomers as followers, the interviewed Millennials often feel scepticism in relation to their followers. Consequently, Millennials feel the need to prove themselves towards their leaders. However, after a short time, that experienced scepticism seemed to faint in the opinion of the
Millennials. The experiences of the Millennials as leaders go in line with the answers given by the Baby Boomers as followers, who expressed that they were first surprised about a leader who is from the Millennial generation. The interviewed Baby Boomers seemed to have a lack of trust in the competence of the Millennials at first. As soon as their leaders showed their competence in the job, Baby Boomers were less sceptical. However, when Millennials tried to show their competence in the job in inappropriate and artificial ways, Baby Boomers experienced it as very negative, since they said that they do not need the Millennials to prove themselves.

b) In the work relationship between Millennials as followers and Baby Boomers as leaders, preconceptions were not explicitly mentioned as one of the main areas of experience. Nevertheless, when they started working, Millennials as followers felt their relationship to their leaders was influenced due to their fear of not being accepted and respected, because of their young generation. They were afraid their leader would be biased about their thinking and how they act, because of their generation. However, when they worked together for a longer time it turned out that their leaders always trusted them and accepted their way of thinking, which is the reason why preconceptions do not influence them in their work relationship to their leaders anymore.
4.3 Discussion

After having analysed our empirical data, based on the areas of experience, which we have found, we now discuss the findings of our analysis. We therefore compare the two leader-follower relationships with each other, based on the areas, and connect them to the theoretical background, which we provided at the beginning of our thesis.

**Figure 4: Areas of experience of Millennials and Baby Boomers in leader-follower relationships**

![Areas of experience](source: Created by the authors)

- **Honesty/ Open Communication**
- **Work Climate**
- **Mindset towards Change**
- **Learning from each other**
- **Appreciating each other**
  - **Respect**
  - **Trust**
- **Intensity of Relationship**
- **Preconceptions**

**Source: Created by the authors**

- Due to our results, **honesty and open communications** seem to be equally important for both Millennials and Baby Boomers in either relationship. Even though in both relationships, honesty and open communications are highly expected, it seems as sometimes Millennials and Baby Boomers experience this area negatively. On one hand, they are not sure if their leaders or followers are open and honest towards them and on the other hand, some of them experience a lack of listening skills from their leaders. Due to the findings in our theoretical framework, we discovered that especially Millennials are associated with having the drive for open and frequent communications. (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; DelCampo, 2011) In line with that, Tallia et al. (2006) also point out, that effective communication is one of the important factors in work relationships.

- As a next aspect, in both relationships, a good **work climate**, in connection to getting along with leaders, followers and colleagues, is highly important in workplaces. When people are open towards each other, motivated at work and fun to be around, Millennials as
well as Baby Boomers experience a positive work climate in both relationships. However, in both relationships, Millennials were usually described as the generation which is more motivated and energised and therefore more fun to work with. Additionally, it was experienced that hierarchical structures can influence a work climate. Since Millennials as well as Baby Boomers as followers replied, they experience a good work climate when the relationship to their leader is not too hierarchical, it seems as too much of hierarchy is not seen very positively for either generation in a following position. In line with this, we also revealed, it is important to the followers of our study that their leaders do not distance themselves too much, are interested, supportive as well as involved in their team. Especially support is in our theoretical framework also described as one of several important dimensions in work relationships. (Ferris et al., 2009) This result confirms the argumentation of Cogin (2012) and DelCampo (2011), who claim that mainly Millennials are seen as the ones who prefer a collective workplace rather than hierarchical structures.

- In both work relationships, a rigid **mindset towards change** of the Baby Boomer generation is observed and negatively experienced. Sometimes Baby Boomers have the tendency to still work as they used to many years ago, but in today’s workplaces, in order to experience a positive work climate, they are required to adjust to changes, no matter in which position they are. When it comes to technology, Millennials are in both relationships more open-minded and familiar with it, most likely because they grew up with digitalization, as described in our theoretical framework. (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008) As Venter (2017) points out, due to the fact that Baby Boomers did not grow up with technology, they have more difficulties using it. However, if Millennials encourage Baby Boomers in either position to get familiar with technology as well as their way of thinking, and if, in turn, Baby Boomers are open for it and take on the challenge, then their work relationship can be positively experienced.

- Millennials and Baby Boomers value **learning from each other** equally no matter if they are in a leading or following position. Baby Boomers are happy, in either relationship, to give Millennials certain responsibilities in areas where they know more, such as technology, in turn, Millennials are glad to learn from the experiences of the Baby Boomers. However, we assume learning from each other is about “give and take”, where everyone is satisfied if they can apply their strengths and knowledge, while they also appreciate if others do the same. Therefore, it is seen positively by Millennials and Baby Boomers in either relationship and they are convinced that Millennials and Baby Boomers in this area complement each other well. Learning from each other was not a topic which
we explicitly discovered in the theoretical framework, but it was pointed out that generational diversity rather leads to conflicts between different generations in a workplace. (Birkman, 2016) Due to that statement, we were mostly positively surprised about Millennials and Baby Boomers rather learning from each other instead of facing conflicts in their work relationship.

- The fact of **appreciating each other** was more important in the relationship where Baby Boomers are the leaders. Millennials have a strong need to be appreciated in this relationship, while Baby Boomers realise their need and try to satisfy it. While Baby Boomers in both relationships did not mention their need to be appreciated, they still value it when they experience appreciation by their leader. On the other hand, they recognise it negatively when there is a lack of appreciation from the Millennials as followers. Appreciation was not a topic that was discussed in the literature, concerning neither generation nor work relationship. Therefore, it might be an issue that is usually not acknowledged as being important when looking at literature of leader-follower relationships or generational diversity.

- **Respect** seems to be valued more in work relationships with Millennials as leaders. Both parties feel respected by each other, although Millennials at first have the feeling they need to gain the respect from their followers first. However, in the relationship where Baby Boomers are leaders, Millennials seem to appreciate respect from either side, while for Baby Boomers it is more important to be respected. In both relationships, this difference in the approach to respect could be related to the theoretical idea that depending on the belonging to a generation, different preferred leadership styles occur, as argued by Kapoor and Solomon (2011). It is said that Millennials prefer flat hierarchical structures in the workplace (Cogin, 2012; DelCampo, 2011). Therefore, they might expect to be respected more, even though they are in a follower role.

- **Trust** is a topic that matters in both leader-follower relationships. In the relationship with Millennials as leaders, both parties trust and feel trusted by each other, although both sides expressed a few doubts about feeling trusted from time to time. However, in the relationship with Baby Boomers as leaders, trust seems to matter more to the Millennials than the Baby Boomers. It is more important for them to be trusted and a lack of trust influences their communication negatively, which leads to negative experiences for the Millennials. As Ferris et al. (2009) describe, trust is an essential factor for successful relationships and can diminish uncertainty regarding the future. Empirically analysing the
experiences of Millennials and Baby Boomers in leader-follower relationship also shows that trust is important in these two relationships.

- In both leader-follower relationships, it seems not to be from great importance for either party to have **private relationships** with their leaders or follower. Nevertheless, Millennials seem in general to value it more and have closer relationships to work colleagues and meet them also outside of work. However, these closer relationships are rather with people from their own generation, no matter if the Millennial is a leader or a follower. In the work relationship with Millennials as leaders, both parties expressed doubts that the other generation is even interested in getting to know each other privately, although none of them has tried to initiate it. As Cogin (2012) and Ng and Parry (2016) argue, people who grow up in the same period of time are sharing a set of beliefs and hence develop collective ideas. People from the same generation might have more common interests in life and therefore more topics for communication. They are sharing same experiences and memories which can give them a closer bond in comparison to other generations (Cogin, 2012; Ng & Parry, 2016). This could be the reason why Millennials have rather closer relationships to other Millennials than to Baby Boomers. Baby Boomers are described as having a higher work centrality and wanting more stability in work with the willingness to leave family and free time behind (Twenge, 2010; Venter, 2017). This might be the reason why Baby Boomers in fact have less private relationships in their workplace.

- For both relationships, **preconceptions** towards the other generation were issues, however, it seems as after a while of working together, these preconceptions were no barriers for their work relationship anymore. While in the first relationship, Millennials as leaders have to prove themselves in order to receive respect from their followers, in the second relationship, Millennials as followers are afraid, due to their short amount of experiences, their leaders would not accept or respect them right away, even though it turned out that their leaders were not thinking that way. These statements let us assume, due to their short time of work experience, Millennials are in general more biased about the fact that Baby Boomers might not respect them and they assume having to prove themselves when they start working together. We assume, there is a societal preconception, that leaders are more likely from the Baby Boomer generation instead of the Millennial generation. Therefore, we believe, if that “natural” way is turned around and Millennials are in a leading position, Baby Boomers are surprised and need an explanation for it.
5 Conclusion

This chapter includes the answer to our research question. We point out the most significant findings of our empirical study and compare the experiences from both relationships combined, in order to demonstrate the meaning of all findings, to present our reflections for both relationships together and to give an overall picture of the thesis work. The first part is followed by a description of the study’s contribution to research as well as practitioners, the limitations of our study, followed by mentioning possible future research areas. We finish the conclusion as well as our whole study with an illustration of our own journey of learning.

5.1 Answer to Research Question and Reflections

Concerning our research question, we wanted to find out how Millennials and Baby Boomers experience their leader-follower work relationships:

a) When Millennials are leaders and Baby Boomers are followers
b) When Millennials are followers and Baby Boomers are leaders

In the theoretical framework, we took a closer look at two generations - Millennials and Baby Boomers – and furthermore reviewed literature on work relationships as well as specifically leader-follower relationships. The literature review is followed by our empirical study, where we found out, how leaders and followers of each generation evaluate their work relationship with the other generation. We, therefore, identified four interview categories, in each of which we found patterns based on the empirical data that led us to nine relevant areas of experience. All of these nine areas matter to our interview participants when experiencing a leader-follower relationship with the other generation. Since these areas are relevant in both leader-follower relationships, we are combining these two in our answer of the research question.

Through the empirical findings, we have discovered similarities and differences between both generations as well as both work relationships.

In the relationship when Millennials are leaders as well as in the relationship when Baby Boomers are leaders, having an open mind was a necessary factor for all Millennials as well as Baby Boomers. Nowadays, society and workplaces have changed compared to how they operated 20 years ago and Baby Boomers are required to adjust themselves to these changes, in order to experience a positive work relationship with Millennials. Both generations have better experiences with work relationships when Baby Boomers are not stuck in old ways of
doing their work but rather have an open mindset towards change and are interested in new developments and strategies. Prior to our empirical study, we assumed both generations would experience their work relationship rather negatively if Baby Boomers are stuck in their mindset and are not open for the “new” thinking of Millennials. We conclude it might be a struggle for some Baby Boomers to constantly adjust their way of working and be open for changes. However, we were surprised how positive and hopeful the Baby Boomers, whom we interviewed, were towards changing their own mindset and being open about new and unknown ways of doing work.

Two other important factors, in work relationships between Millennials and Baby Boomers, were honesty connected with open communication. Both generations experienced their work relationships negatively if their leader or follower of the other generation did not communicate openly or did not behave honestly towards them. This area of experience is, in our opinion, also highly connected with trusting each other. We found out that trust is needed in order to be honest with each other and, in turn, an open communication can only occur if either one in the work relationship trusts the other one. We assume trust has to exist in every kind of relationship in order to be able to communicate openly and honestly and therefore experience the relationship positively.

When it comes to the intensity of the relationship, as another area of experience, we found out, Millennials as followers rather spend time with their colleagues after work, while Millennials as leaders do not meet their colleagues privately. Both, Baby Boomers as leaders and as followers, on the other hand, do not spend time with Millennials after work. Though, if Baby Boomers as leaders are interested in spending time with their followers and want to do activities with their team, Millennials are considered to be very open for it. Interestingly, Millennials as leaders do not meet their followers of the Baby Boomer generation after work, because they are not sure if the Baby Boomers are open for and interested in meeting each other after work. We conclude, Millennials as leaders are not approaching their followers to privately meet each other because they might assume Baby Boomers would most likely refuse. However, we found out, Baby Boomers as followers would be open for privately spending time with Millennials as their leaders.

We conclude, the intensity of the relationship might not be as strong between Millennials and Baby Boomers than between Millennials and other Millennials in leading and following positions, because of prejudiced assumptions and lack of communication. Baby Boomers as followers might very well be interested in meeting their leaders of the other generation after
work, but they possibly do not suggest that, due to their position in the workplace. On the basis of our study, we identified similar patterns in the relationship when Baby Boomers are leaders, because they are also the ones who suggest spending time with their followers privately, hence, we assume the intensity of the relationship is mostly controlled by the leaders and if they are open for it, the work relationship also takes place on a private level.

Millennials familiarity with technology was one interesting part of our empirical findings, which we also pointed out in the theoretical framework. All Millennials and Baby Boomers, who were involved in our study, were convinced that technology is the main area in which Millennials, in general, have more knowledge than Baby Boomers. In our opinion, technology is the biggest change to which Baby Boomers have to adjust themselves. However, we are convinced that many Baby Boomers are open for it and even if they are not, they value having Millennials in the workplace from whom they can either learn about technology or who take care of all work which is related to it.

A surprising statement, which was pointed out by both generations during some of the conducted interviews, was made about Millennials who seem to be more motivated and energised at work than Baby Boomers. This outcome disagrees with the statement in Myers and Sadaghiani (2010), where it is argued that Millennials are assumed to be unmotivated and try to avoid hard work. We were therefore positively amazed when even some of the Baby Boomers said they rather work with someone from the Millennial generation.

Respect, as another area of experience, was very important in the relationship when Millennials are leaders, while in the relationship when Millennials are followers, it was not mentioned as a relevant factor. When Millennials are leaders and have followers of the Baby Boomer generation, perhaps due to their experienced prejudices, they have a greater urge of having to prove themselves in relation to their followers, than Baby Boomers as leaders do.

We assume Baby Boomers as leaders do not feel they have to prove themselves and earn respect from their followers of the Millennial generation because in society it is more natural and therefore accepted to have Baby Boomers in a leading position. However, if Millennials are in a leading position, which is not as common, they are more likely to be in the need of having to earn their respect and proving they have the right knowledge to be in that position.

Learning from each other was the most surprising area of experience for us, because, prior to the study, we did not expect that it was as important to any generation as it actually is. This area of experience was the most important one in connection to positively experiencing work relationships between different generations. Especially, Millennials and Baby Boomers can
learn a lot from each other’s different strengths, experiences and knowledge, which is seen as one of the most positive aspects of multigenerational workplaces.

Prior to the study, we assumed, due to their differences, Millennials and Baby Boomers would rather face conflicts and therefore, be confronted with negative experiences in their work relationship. However, through our study, we found out that their multigenerational relationship is rather experienced as an enrichment, because of the fact that Millennials learn from Baby Boomers and the other way around.

The conclusion of our study is therefore, that Millennials and Baby Boomers are in some ways different from each other, face challenges and prejudices, but overall value working together in multigenerational workplaces, where they can learn from each other and combine their different strengths. Due to our findings, we also conclude, if Millennials, as well as Baby Boomers, are aware of the different mindsets and what their leaders or followers of the other generation value in work relationships, a harmonic work climate can be created, which also positively affects the success of their workplace.

5.2 Contribution

5.2.1 For research

With our study of the cohabitation in multigenerational workplaces with the specification in leader-follower relationships between Millennials and Baby Boomers we are contributing to the research fields of generations, work relationships and in specific leader-follower relationships. A qualitative study in the specific area of leader-follower relationships between Millennials and Baby Boomers could not be found during our process of literature review. We, therefore, have investigated something that has not been investigated before.

In our study, we have found nine relevant areas of experience within leader-follower relationships between Millennials and Baby Boomers. These areas are the following: Honesty/open communication, work climate, mindset towards change, learning from each other, appreciating each other, respect, trust, intensity of relationship and preconceptions.

With this thesis, we provide detailed insight about the experiences of Millennials and Baby Boomers within the mentioned areas. These areas of experience form a concept on which further research in this area can be based. The areas of experience reflect behaviours, expectations, values and perceptions of Millennials as well as Baby Boomers within their leader-follower relationships. With our study, we, thereby, additionally contribute to the
research area of leadership and management and furthermore to the topic of followership, which has not been studied much yet.

5.2.2 For practitioners

Several studies argue that leadership is a collaboration and shared process between leaders and followers (Uhl-Bien, 2014; Lord et al., 1999; Evans, 2010). Therefore, as further argued by Speckhart and Grayson (2006), it is important for leaders to know their followers’ characteristics and behaviours in order to lead them in the best possible way. Our study provides insight for managers about values, expectations and behaviours of followers. Specifically, our study gives information for leaders who are either Baby Boomers or Millennials and have followers from the Millennial or Baby Boomer generation. As suggested, by Cogin (2012) and DelCampo (2011), there is a need for managers to know the strengths and weaknesses of each generation and adjust their leadership styles accordingly.

Our thesis can be a guide for managers on how to adjust their leadership style in order to ensure a good leader-follower relationship with each generation. The results of our study can raise awareness among managers and even team members to accept different behaviours and expectations in leader-follower relationships with different generations.

Our findings indicate that an open mindset and honest communication is important and should be encouraged by leaders for ensuring positive experiences in work relationships. Moreover, creating events in which Baby Boomers and Millennials have the opportunity to communicate more privately and get to know each other outside the workplace can lead to more understanding the behaviour of each of them.

Furthermore, the results show that in a work relationship between Baby Boomers and Millennials learning is an important aspect. Therefore, we recommend, based on the results of our thesis, to encourage a learning atmosphere in the workplace between these two generations. Inspiring Baby Boomers and Millennials to work together can, therefore, be a benefit for leaders as well as followers. Even though we are able to indicate some possible topics, which matter to Millennials and Baby Boomers in their leader-follower relationships, managers still need to be aware that each person has a different personality and stereotypes about generations should be avoided. Managers, as we found out in our thesis, should be free of preconceptions, since they can influence a leader-follower relationship in a negative way.
5.3 Limitations

Related to the way of conducting our study, there are a few limitations which should be discussed. First of all, we used a qualitative strategy for conducting our study. A qualitative study provides, in general, already a limitation due to the few sources of empirical data that is used. Our results are only based on the insights of 16 interview participants. However, by conducting extensive interviews and enrichening our thesis with detailed insights about our study approach, we attempted to raise the trustworthiness of our findings.

Furthermore, our study is limited to interview participants from Europe, which makes it difficult to ensure transferability of the results. Interviewees from different countries and cultures might have provided other insights into the topic of generations and leader-follower relationships. Nevertheless, we believe to have a high level of variance among the interviewees when it comes to the industries they work in, which has a positive effect on the transferability of our study.

Another limitation of our study is the given time frame in which the thesis needed to be written. Due to the time frame, an even higher variance and amount of interview participants was not possible to achieve.

A final limitation is that we have found out the areas of experience within leader-follower relationships between Millennials and Baby Boomers, however, a possible connection between these areas is not clearly shown yet. It cannot be seen in which way different experiences might be related to each other. The findings of our study let us assume that there is some sort of connection between some of the areas of experience. Nevertheless, due to the scope of this study, a detailed conclusion about possible connections cannot be drawn.

5.4 Further Research

Since we did not draw possible connections between the different areas of experience, future research could elaborate on that, in order to specify the areas of experience even further. Moreover, each area of experience could in future research be studied, in further detail.

In addition, similar studies can be conducted in different geographical areas with different cultures. This study included interview participants mostly from Germany and Sweden, however, conducting the study in other European countries or outside of Europe might lead to different outcomes which, furthermore, could be compared with each other in order to get an
overall view on the topic of leader-follower relationships between Millennials and Baby Boomers.

The same is applicable for the areas of industry where the interview participants work. Since we were trying to have a variance among the industry areas in our study, future research can focus on leader-follower relationships in a specific industry area.

Furthermore, differences in the results might also occur when a study separates between female and male interview participants, which is another possible field for future studies in this area of research.

Another possible future study in this field could use the opportunity to look at specific leader-follower relationships. In our study, we have not looked at pairs of leaders and followers, we have rather conducted interviews with people who do not work together in order to increase the chance of receiving honest answers. However, it would be interesting to see how, in a specific relationship, both parties perceive their relationship.

Since our study looked at the topic of generations and not age or life-stages in relation to leader-follower relationships, a future study could be conducted when the Millennials are in the same age as the Baby Boomers now and a new generation is in the age in which the Millennials are now. The results of a future study like this could clarify the impact of generation, age and life-stages more.

Finally, conducting a quantitative study based on the concept of our study could validate the results of this thesis. Furthermore, a quantitative study could be conducted in each area of experience in order to gain a further understanding for each of them.

### 5.5 Our Journey of Learning

Writing this study as a team has brought us closer and gave us the opportunity to grow together. At the beginning of the thesis process, we could not imagine producing a work like this with as many pages as were required. However, facing occurring challenges and questions step by step gave us enough confidence to believe in ourselves. We have learned a lot about our working and writing styles and how to trust each other. Since we are both rather calm and positive thinking persons, we managed not to stress out too much in the writing process and, in times of doubts, encourage each other. Writing the thesis has taught us to structure our work well, follow a time schedule and see what is important to prioritise.
Furthermore, we have learned to work productively and efficiently by ourselves as well as in a team.

At the beginning of the thesis, we both had the idea of approaching the topic of generational diversity in workplaces rather negatively since we expected to find more conflicts instead of advantages in leader-follower relationships between Millennials and Baby Boomers. However, we are glad that our professor and supervisor made us look at the topic from a more neutral perspective. Thanks to that, writing the thesis more open-minded raised our awareness and understanding for the generation of Baby Boomers. A more open mindset and the specific findings of our thesis - the nine areas of experience – will help us, as Millennials, in our future work-life when we encounter working together with people from the Baby Boomer generation. Nevertheless, the insights of the conducted interviews and the results will also guide us in our personal life whenever we are in touch with the Baby Boomer generation, for example in our family, relations and other occasions.

The probably greatest learning outcome for us is the realisation that as long as people have an open mindset, are open for compromises and are willing to adjust to each other, great relationships can evolve, no matter to which generation one belongs or in what hierarchical position one finds oneself. We, therefore, look forward to spreading that spirit in our future workplaces and experiencing cohabitation in multigenerational workplaces from a new perspective.
References


