Leading with Soft Skill-Z

An exploratory case study on the influence of soft leadership skills on the motivation and engagement of Generation Z as employees

MASTER THESIS WITHIN: Business Administration

NUMBER OF CREDITS: 30 ECTS

PROGRAMME OF STUDY: Global Management

AUTHORS: Emma Riksen & Tamara Spies

JÖNKÖPING 19th May 2023
Master Thesis in Business Administration

Title: Leading with Soft Skill-Z: An exploratory case study on the influence of soft leadership skills on the motivation and engagement of Generation Z as employees.

Authors: Emma Riksen & Tamara Spies

Tutor: Emma Stendahl

Date: 19th May 2022

Key terms: Generation Z – leadership – soft skills – motivation – engagement

Abstract

Background and problem discussion: With Generation Z entering the workplace, organizations are faced employing up to four generations at the same time, which leads to disparate perspectives on work ethics, values, and leadership on the work floor. According to existing research, Generation Z tends to value certain interpersonal qualities, so-called soft skills, in their leaders more than previous generations do. This soft side of leadership involves for example communication, teamwork, and building a good relationship. It is of great importance to create an understanding of what motivates and engages the youngest generation in the workforce. As existing literature foremost focuses on comparing Generation Z to previous generations and the topic of the influence of soft leadership skills is under-studied, a research gap is identified. The attributes motivation and engagement are essential parts of leadership, and the understanding of how to influence these is of high importance for companies. Therefore, the influence of soft leadership skills on the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees is identified as a gap in research.

Research Purpose: The purpose of this study is to create new knowledge and add to the theory of previous research by acknowledging the perspective of the newest generation at work and providing a greater insight on the influence of soft leadership skills on Generation Z’s motivation and engagement. The findings of this study strive to fulfill the identified research gap and have a significant impact on understanding the influence of soft leadership skills from a Generation Z employee perspective.

Research Question: How do soft leadership skills influence the motivation and engagement of Generation Z as employees?

Research Method: This study, with the philosophical assumption of a relativist ontology and a social constructionist epistemology, follows a qualitative approach where we study the perceptions of our research participants: Generation Z employees. We conduct a holistic single case study, with an exploratory research purpose, which allows for an in-depth understanding of our case company Ernst & Young. The data is analyzed utilizing the Gioia method.

Conclusion: It becomes evident from our study that it has a positive contribution to the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees when a leader owes and applies strong soft leadership skills. Our study shows that the strongest influential factors are open face-to-face communication, promoting a supportive work environment, and finally the relationship between the leader and the Generation Z employee.
Acknowledgment

We would like to make use of this opportunity to express our gratitude and acknowledge the people who have supported us throughout the process of writing our master’s thesis.

First and foremost, we want to show our gratitude towards our supervisor Emma Stendahl. With great insights Emma has supported us, provided us with feedback, and guided us through the process. Moreover, Emma created a fun and open sphere during tutoring sessions and seminars, which made us even more confident and motivated throughout this semester.

Secondly, we would like to thank our research participants, working at Ernst & Young, for their generosity in both time and insightful interviews. Without you, this work could not have been completed as smoothly and at a fast-paced tempo.

Additionally, we would like to express our gratitude to all other people that have contributed to the final product of this master’s thesis in their own way. That includes all professors and lecturers we had in courses during our time studying at JIBS, the SSA-Swap team, the JUSA-board, and our friends, families, and loved ones. A special thanks to our parents Harm-Jan & Marjon, Volker & Andrea.

And last but not least, we would like to thank and give a big shoutout to the most wonderful group of friends and fellow thesis writers Julia, Lina, Adam & Moritz, better known as the Dream Team. Thank you for all the supportive talks, for reviewing our texts, and most of all for all the laughs and coffees. “Okaaaaay, let’s go.”

With a big smile and somewhat a feeling of relief we managed to complete our master’s thesis: a big thank you to everyone!

Tack så mycket, Bedankt and Vielen Dank!

Emma Riksen & Tamara Spies

Jönköping, 19th May 2023

____________________   __________________
Emma Riksen             Tamara Spies
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 1
   1.1 Background .................................................................................................................................. 1
   1.2 Problem discussion ...................................................................................................................... 2
   1.3 Research purpose ......................................................................................................................... 4
   1.4 Delimitations ............................................................................................................................... 4

2. Theoretical background ................................................................................................................ 6
   2.1 Method of literature search .......................................................................................................... 6
   2.2 Literature review of generational studies ...................................................................................... 7
      2.2.1 Generational theory ............................................................................................................... 7
      2.2.2 Defining the cohort Generation Z .......................................................................................... 8
      2.2.3 Generation Z as employees .................................................................................................. 9
      2.2.4 Generation Z employees’ motivation and engagement .......................................................... 10
   2.3 Literature review of soft leadership skills .................................................................................... 12
      2.3.1 Leadership theory ............................................................................................................... 12
      2.3.2 Soft skills theory .................................................................................................................. 13
      2.3.3 Soft leadership skills characteristics .................................................................................... 14
   2.4 Theoretical lens ........................................................................................................................... 16
      2.4.1 Leadership from Generation Z employees’ perspective ....................................................... 17
      2.4.2 Leadership characteristics from Generation Z employees’ perspective within this theoretical lens ................................................................................................................................. 18

3. Methodology .................................................................................................................................... 21
   3.1 Research philosophy .................................................................................................................. 22
   3.2 Research strategy ......................................................................................................................... 23
      3.2.1 Research approach ................................................................................................................. 23
      3.2.2 A case study research design ............................................................................................... 25
   3.3 Method ........................................................................................................................................ 26
3.3.1 Semi-structured interviews ........................................ 27
3.3.2 Official company documents ..................................... 29
3.3.3 Sampling strategy ...................................................... 29
3.4 Data analysis .................................................................. 31
3.5 Trustworthiness ............................................................. 34
  3.5.1 Credibility ................................................................ 34
  3.5.2 Transferability ......................................................... 34
  3.5.3 Dependability .......................................................... 35
  3.5.4 Confirmability .......................................................... 35
3.6 Research ethics ............................................................. 35
4. Findings ....................................................................... 37
  4.1 Communication ........................................................... 37
    4.1.1 Face-to-face communicational skilled leader is motivating and engaging Generation Z .............................................. 37
    4.1.2 Feedback is important to motivate and engage Generation Z .......................................................... 38
  4.2 Relationship ............................................................... 39
    4.2.1 An empathic leader is motivating and engaging Generation Z .......................................................... 39
    4.2.2 Social connection with leader is important to Generation Z .......................................................... 40
    4.2.3 Soft leadership skills are important for Generation Z .......................................................... 41
  4.3 Supportive work environment .......................................... 41
    4.3.1 Feeling valuable and doing valuable work is motivating and engaging Generation Z .............................................. 41
    4.3.2 Work environment is important to Generation Z .......................................................... 42
    4.3.3 Teamwork is important to motivate and engage Generation Z .......................................................... 42
5. Analysis ....................................................................... 44
  5.1 Preferences in soft leadership skills of Generation Z employees .......................................................... 44
  5.2 Soft leadership skills influencing Generation Z employees’ motivation and engagement .......................................................... 45
    5.2.1 Communication .......................................................... 45
5.2.2 Relationship

5.2.3 Supportive work environment

5.3 The influence of soft leadership skills on motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees

6. Conclusion

6.1 Answer to research question

6.2 Theoretical implications

6.3 Practical implications

6.4 Limitations

6.5 Future research

6.6 Concluding remarks

7. Reference list
List of Figures

Figure 1. Research methodology visualized ................................................................. 21
Figure 2. Visualization of empirical data ....................................................................... 33
Figure 3. Model for the Influence of Soft Leadership Skills on the Motivation and Engagement of Generation Z Employees ................................................................. 51

List of Tables

Table 1. Definitions Generation Z ..................................................................................... 8
Table 2. Outlining soft leadership skills characteristics ..................................................... 15
Table 3. Leadership preferences of Generation Z ............................................................... 17
Table 4. Interview participants ........................................................................................ 30

Appendices

Appendix A Interview Questions ....................................................................................... 64
Appendix B Interview Guideline ....................................................................................... 66
Appendix C Participant Information Sheet ....................................................................... 67
1. Introduction

The introduction chapter provides an overview of the contextual foundation for this research. This chapter starts with a background description of the research topic, followed by the problem discussion. Additionally, a discussion of how this thesis contributes to existing research is proposed and our research purpose and research questions are elaborated on, concluding with a delimitation section.

1.1 Background

Whereas workplaces continuously change, a new generational cohort is making its way into the international business world as we speak (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). It is suggested that different generational cohorts have diverse understandings of work values and business ethics on the work floor (Bucovetchi et al., 2019; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Although generational difference is a topic that has been studied frequently throughout the years, the connection to generational characteristics at work and differences in employee behavior has foremost been studied on Generation X and -Y (Twenge et al., 2010). With that in mind, this study focuses on the next generational cohort to enter the workforce: Generation Z.

The generational cohorts that dominate the workforce today are Generation X, born between 1965 and 1981, and Generation Y, also known as Millennials and born between 1982 and 1995 (Irina et al., 2020; Rudolph et al., 2018). With the newest generation entering the workplace, organizations are now faced employing up to four generations at the same time, which contributes to disparate perspectives on work ethics, values, and leadership (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998; Twenge et al., 2010). Stillman and Stillman (2017) underline that especially the rise of Generation Z will shake things up at the workplace, as the generational gap that technology is causing between employees might increase. Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) substantiate this claim where Generation Z is described as a generation that will bring new behaviors and new ways of looking at issues regarding leadership. Aggarwal et al. (2020) describe that people from Generation Z have high expectations and are more inclined towards the concept of ‘working with’ than ‘working for’ when it comes to their mindset towards their work and leader. This means that working within a team and with a leader is preferred over working for a directive hierarchical leader. Therefore, leaders of today need to shape a work environment that meets the new way of young employees (Aggarwal et al., 2020; Niezurawska et al., 2023). Generation Z, born between 1995 and 2010, is the generation that is predominantly born with
the rise and existence of the internet, and is therefore also called the ‘iGeneration’ (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). By growing up in a highly technologically advanced era, this cohort is often described as efficient and in tune with both the offline and online world (Stillman & Stillman, 2017).

It is suggested that Generation Z has a different understanding of leadership and work values than previous generations (Bucovetchi et al., 2019; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). For example, research indicates that Generation Z prefers competitive over collaborative teamwork compared to Generation Y (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). According to research, Generation Z tends to value certain interpersonal qualities in their leaders more than other generational cohorts and places importance on these traits (Seemiller & Grace, 2019). Clear and open communication and the need to be inspired and supported by their leader are examples of these interpersonal characteristics and are categorized as soft skills (McGaha, 2018). According to a study by Grow and Yang (2018), Generation Z even expects their ideal leader to have soft skills within their leadership skill portfolio. Hurrell et al. (2013, p. 162) define soft skills as “non-technical and not reliant on abstract reasoning, involving interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities to facilitate mastered performance in particular contexts” and are nowadays a commonly used term in the working environment due to the increasingly interpersonal nature of workplaces. Soft skills include the side of leadership that involves motivating, inspiring, and persuading followers, as well as building good relationships and networking. Compared to hard skills like analyzing, planning, making decisions, and strategizing, which the majority of scholarship on skills needed for leadership focused on (Riggio & Tan, 2014). Heckman and Kautz (2012) for example mention that soft skills predict success in life and are an important factor within an effective, motivating, and engaging skill portfolio.

1.2 Problem discussion

Understanding the newest workforce and acknowledging the challenges and opportunities that new cohorts bring with them is of paramount importance for organizations today (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Generation Z, currently consisting of approximately 74 million people in this group of age, is becoming a stronger and larger group in the workforce and will bring new perspectives on leadership and work values (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). The importance of studying how to lead the new generation becomes evident due to the rising challenge of differences between generations. For example the differences in values, motivation, work style preferences, and the perception of a good leader compared to previous generations (Arsenault,
This leads to that the entrance of Generation Z into the work field is a frequently discussed and highly relevant topic within existing literature today (Aggarwal et al., 2020; Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Hurrelmann & Albrecht, 2021; Niezurawska et al., 2023; Seemiller & Grace, 2019). The focus of the existing literature, however, lies foremost within comparing Generation Z, their characteristics, and their uniqueness in the business environment to the previous generations, such as Generation X and -Y (Twenge et al., 2010). Another interesting research phenomenon increasing in the literature today are the soft characteristics of leadership, also called soft skills (Hurrell et al., 2013; Marques, 2013). The importance of these interpersonal characteristics of a leader and the rising focus on soft skills rather than hard skills becomes evident in the increase of existing literature on the soft side of leadership (AbuJbara & Worley, 2018; Marques, 2013). Nevertheless, these soft leadership skills are not vastly studied regarding the generational cohort ‘Z’. The combination of these topics leaves an interesting and important research topic, especially since cohort ‘Z’ tends to have a preference for interpersonal competencies within leadership (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021).

In a systematic literature review by Barhate and Dirani (2022), a research gap is identified connecting Generation Z to career aspirations and the entrance to the work field: “Empirical research is needed to help organizations explore how to motivate, engage and develop Gen Z as employees” as cited by Barhate and Dirani (2022, p. 153). As Generation Z enters the workforce, companies must concentrate on understanding what motivates the youngest generation in the workforce and how to adapt the workplace to engage Generation Z (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). Within our study, we respond to this call for further research by focusing on the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees, since understanding Generation Z’s behavior and their motivational and engagement drivers will help managers better integrate the new employees into the workplace for mutual success (Pandita & Kumar, 2022).

Given little empirical and theoretical insights on the combination of the topics ‘motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees’ and ‘soft leadership skills’, we find that these combined phenomena leave a novel and interesting research opportunity. Therefore, our study focuses on soft leadership skills and the motivation and engagement of Generation Z as employees.
1.3 Research purpose

Through the problem discussion, the research topic was defined, and therefore the research question of this exploratory study is formulated as:

*RQ: How do soft leadership skills influence the motivation and engagement of Generation Z as employees?*

This study aims to contribute to scientific theory by illustrating the influence of soft leadership skills on Generation Z employees’ motivation and engagement as they are and will remain an increasing percentage of today’s workforce. This research supports previous research by acknowledging the perspective of the newest generation to enter the workforce and providing a greater knowledge of the influence that soft leadership skills have on Generation Z. This study contributes to the literature on Generation Z and leadership theory specified on soft leadership skills. Through our study, new insights concerning the perspective of Generation Z employees on motivation and engagement at work are created. Additionally, our contribution to soft leadership skill theory tailors and advances knowledge about the influence of soft skills on the new generation. The findings of this study strive to have a significant impact on companies and leaders and contribute to the understanding of soft leadership skills from a Generation Z perspective. Additionally, this study supports Generation Z employees to understand and acknowledge their own cohort’s motivation and engagement at work. Such insights are also beneficial to future Generation Z research and theory as well as the identified research gaps.

1.4 Delimitations

When researching generations, some kind of generalization must be accepted to highlight specific features that characterize a given cohort. Here it should be stated that there are exceptions in every generation and the characteristics that are considered in this study are revealed in research. Additionally, cohorts are defined by birth years in literature and in this study the people born within transition years can have overlapping characteristics with other cohorts. Therefore, within this research Generation Z is viewed as one group with certain characteristics including the acknowledgment of exceptions. This research will additionally not differentiate by gender or culture since the interest is on the perspective of the whole picture of a generation. Additionally, previous studies have mainly focused on Generation Z university students and not Generation Z employees. Therefore Barhate and Dirani (2022) are calling for in-depth observations of Generation Z in the workplace to understand Generation Z’s work.
experience. Thus, this study focuses on Generation Z as employees, born from 1995 to 2010. Additionally, the focus of this research was narrowed down to employees born between 1995 and 2005 because no employees below 18 years old were involved due to ethical reasons. As mentioned above, the research gap by Barhate and Dirani (2022) focuses on the motivation, engagement, and development of Generation Z as employees. This study excludes the development aspect of Generation Z due to the close relation to an educational environment rather than a work environment, since within this study the focus is on Generation Z employees and not students.
2. Theoretical background

This chapter outlines the theoretical background of our research, which focuses on Generation Z and soft leadership skills as well as on motivation and engagement. After the existing literature is reviewed, we present the theoretical lens of our study. This theoretical lens portrays the literature that emerged from the literature review of this study, which formed the theoretical perspective on how we approached our research.

2.1 Method of literature search

A detailed description of the literature review approach is essential for a rich and informative literature review. For this literature review Web of Science and Emerald were utilized as the main databases. Web of Science was foremost selected as a journals-search database since it contains a broad collection of scientific and economic-based peer-reviewed literature and the availability of relevant literature for the topic of this study. In addition to Web of Science and Emerald the Jönköping University library offers an alternative search engine, called Primo, that consults several databases simultaneously and is used to find relevant literature. The first approach to this literature review was to review existing literature with the keyword “Generation Z”. Both “leadership” and “motivation and engagement” were added to narrow down the existing literature. Leadership was added to the scope since literature shows a difference in preferred leadership by Generation Z compared to other generations. “Motivation and engagement” were chosen because of the identified research gap. The literature review was performed in a funneling method in Web of Science by starting the search with the key term Generation Z, which lead to 80766 results. To find relevant articles to the research topic, the search was narrowed down by adding the key term leadership to the previous search term, resulting in 278 articles. Another search that was conducted is Generation Z and soft leadership skills, resulting in 9 articles. Subsequently, Generation Z and motivation resulted in 427 results, while Generation Z and engagement led to 379 results. To narrow down the results of relevant articles, the language of the articles was restricted to English. In addition, since Generation Z is a relatively young research phenomenon the searched articles about this generational cohort were narrowed down to publishing years between 2016 to 2023. This ensures that the literature is relevant to this study. Additional to the funneling method, the literature review is also based on a search method called ‘snowballing’. Hereby, articles were found by researching the references of one relevant article (Wohlin et al., 2020). Finally, to ensure the quality of this
research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), most of the articles used in the literature review were published in journals that are ranked in the Academic Journal Guide 2021 and peer-reviewed. Thereby, several academic journals were identified as important for our study since multiple articles used in this theoretical background were published in those journals. Examples of these useful journals are the International Journal of Management Education, and the Journal of Management.

2.2 Literature review of generational studies

2.2.1 Generational theory

Focusing on generational theory, it is important to understand the term generation. According to Twenge et al. (2010), a generational cohort can be defined as individuals born around the same time and who share significant social or historical life events throughout essential developmental times. Kupperschmidt (2000) underlines this by defining generations as an identifiable group, which shares years of birth and hence significant life events at pivotal stages of development. Each generation is influenced by powerful elements, such as parents, classmates, the media, significant economic and social events, and popular culture, which help to create common value systems that set them apart from others who grew up in earlier or later generations (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998). These elements are strongest during an individual’s childhood and adolescence, where work values tend to remain relatively stable from early adolescence to young adulthood (Twenge et al., 2010). According to Seemiller and Grace (2019), it can be noticed that each generation is marked by its own unique set of characteristics and perspectives through simple observations and conversations.

From the existing literature, it becomes clear that generational difference is a topic that has been studied vastly in the past years (Seemiller & Grace, 2019; Twenge et al., 2010; Wong et al., 2008). As Seemiller and Grace (2019) argue, each generation significantly influences future and consecutive generational cohorts. Therefore it is of significant importance to identify the generations that came before Generation Z (Seemiller & Grace, 2019). Researchers through the years have slightly different views on the years of birth of each generation. However, in a systematic literature review by Wong et al. (2008), it becomes clear that most researchers agree on the following division of relevant generational cohorts as employees: Veterans (1925-1944), Baby Boomers (1945-1964), Gen X (1965-1981), and Gen Y (1982-1995). Generation X and Generation Y, are the generational cohorts that dominate the workforce today (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). With the newest generation entering the workplace, organizations are now faced
employing up to four generations at the same time, which leads to disparate perspectives on work ethics, values, and leadership (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998; Twenge et al., 2010). The following cohort after Generation Y is Generation Z (Seemiller & Grace, 2016) and is the target cohort of this research. Recent studies have, in addition to that, started introducing the Alpha generation: the generation after Generation Z with birth years from 2013 and younger (Bucovetchi et al., 2019).

2.2.2 Defining the cohort Generation Z

From the existing literature it becomes clear that generational differences in workforces foremost have been studied on Generation X and -Y (Twenge et al., 2010), and few existing studies focus on Generation Z as employees. This is, according to Dobrowolski et al. (2022), primarily because these individuals are still in the midst of finishing their studies and kickstarting their professional careers, and few of them have entered the job market so far. Therefore, this study focuses on the next generation now entering the workforce: Generation Z. To get a comprehensive understanding of this generational cohort, it is important to explore the definitions and characteristics existing in literature today. In Table 1 several definitions of Generation Z are displayed according to authors that frequently publish on the topic of Generation Z.

Table 1. Definitions Generation Z

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of birth</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995 - 2012</td>
<td>The individuals of this generation are growing up with the computer and mobile phone at hand; they have easy access to the internet; they are multitasking; they are getting bored quickly; in short, they are: digital, social, global, mobile, flexible, independent and visual; have entrepreneurship ability;</td>
<td>Bucovetchi et al. (2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-2010</td>
<td>Generation Z can be identified as thoughtful, determined, compassionate, open-minded, and responsible. Competitive, spontaneous, adventuresome, and curious.</td>
<td>Seemiller &amp; Grace (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid of 1990 up to mid of 2000</td>
<td>Generation Z representatives are pragmatic, addicted to virtual life as well as to constant information consumption, do-it-yourself people, interested in customization of their job description, confident that “they are competitive with people doing the same job”</td>
<td>Koulopoulos &amp; Keldse (2016)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Generation Z is the generation that is predominantly born with the rise and existence of the internet, and is therefore also called the ‘iGeneration’ (Seemiller & Grace, 2016), ‘Generation Me’ (Bennett et al., 2012), and the ‘Internet Generation’ (Lanier, 2017). Another approach to define Generation Z is as Bucovetchi et al. (2019) discuss, where individuals of this generation are growing up with computers, get bored quickly and are social and flexible. In addition, Koulopoulos and Keldse (2016) express that Generation Z representatives are pragmatic, addicted to virtual life, and do-it-yourself people. Stillman and Stillman (2017) identify that Generation Z has benefited from growing up in a highly technologically advanced era, which has helped them to be smart, efficient, and in tune with both the offline and online world.

This study uses the definition of Generation Z born between 1995-2010, as defined by Seemiller and Grace (2016, 2019). According to the database Web of Science, 201 articles, which is a vast majority of articles regarding the topic of Generation Z, cite the two books by Seemiller and Grace (2016, 2019).

2.2.3 Generation Z as employees

Connecting this research to the work environment, the change in characteristics per generational cohort is significant and allows researchers to take a deep dive and conclude interesting findings (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Twenge et al., 2010). Whereas workplaces continuously change, a new generational cohort is making its way into the business world as we speak (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). This generation, Generation Z, consists of people that will bring new ideas, new behaviors, and new ways of looking at issues as leadership to the business environment (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Aggarwal et al. (2020) argue thereby for that people from Generation Z are more inclined towards the concept of ‘working with’ than ‘working for’ when it comes to their mindset at work. This means that working within a team and with a leader is preferred over working for a directive hierarchical leader. This aligns with the suggestion that Generation Z has different a understanding of leadership than previous generations (Bucovetchi et al., 2019; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Aggarwal et al. (2020) suggest that Generation Z is more open-minded, accepting, and determined on good relationships with their coworkers and leaders than other generations. In addition to that, Dobrowolski et al. (2022) argue that Generation Z is considered to be more intrinsically motivated to achieve their goals and therefore prefers a different style of leadership than previous generations. McCracken et al. (2016) and Bennett et al. (2012) discuss that to obtain a competitive advantage, the acquisition of high-performing and skilled young talent has
become a critical factor for organizations. Managers and leaders of today therefore need to shape a work environment that meets the new ways and habits of their youngest employees (Aggarwal et al., 2020; Niezurawska et al., 2023). Finally, Lanier (2017) underlines the need for Generation X and Generation Y to understand that Generation Z prefers in-person communication with leaders, even though they are raised in a highly technologically advanced world.

2.2.4 Generation Z employees’ motivation and engagement

*Understanding the motivation of Generation Z as employees*

To support the understanding of this research topic it is important to analyze the existing literature on the motivation of Generation Z at work and why it is necessary to study it. Motivation is in this study understood as what moves a person to make certain choices and to engage in action (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). In other words, motivation is responsible for why people decide to do something and how hard they are going to pursue it, as argued by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2021). In existing research by Niezurawska et al. (2023) about motivation and Generation Z, it becomes clear that organizations nowadays are forced to change their approach towards motivating their employees. Whereas the business world is changing into a more knowledge-based economy, organizations become more aware that their people are the company’s most valuable resource (Niezurawska et al., 2023). Nevertheless, organizations still know relatively little about the impact of age diversity on their performance and how to deal with generational diversity in the workplace (Burke et al., 2015; Martins & Martins, 2014). The importance of motivation has become more vivid in the last years and several scholars underline the pivotal role of motivation in increasing work efficiency (Niezurawska et al., 2023). In existing research on motivating Generation Z, it becomes clear that most scholars align with the argument that Generation Z values intrinsic motivation more than any other previous generational cohort (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Mahmoud et al., 2021). Mahmoud et al. (2021) underline this with that Generation Z is more motivated to work on activities that are out of personal satisfaction. Thereby, “Gen Z is intrinsically motivated when their team and supervisor recognize their contributions and implement their ideas” (Barhate & Dirani, 2022, p. 148). Moreover, noteworthy findings by Twenge and Donnelly (2016) argue contrary to most scholars that younger generations increasingly emphasize extrinsic values. Mahmoud et al. (2021) suggest that when organizations attempt to motivate employees from a younger generation, especially Generation Z, that organizations should give more weight to material
rewards like pay raises and non-monetary benefits. Other examples of extrinsically motivating factors for Generation Z can be described as working towards a deadline, competitive work environments, and verbally positive feedback as praises and recognition from their leaders (Holzer et al., 2022; Mahmoud et al., 2021).

**Understanding the engagement of Generation Z as employees**

As employees in organizations are a highly valuable resource and business outcomes foremost rely on the performance of an organization’s staff, it is important to have an engaged workforce (Pandita & Kumar, 2022). Motivation and engagement are terms that frequently go hand in hand in management research and are even often used interchangeably (Harrison et al., 2017). Nevertheless, research shows that the opposite is true, where the terms are strongly connected but do not mean the same. Engagement is defined as the source of motivation, or as “*a merger of motivation and thoughtfulness*” (Harrison et al., 2017, p. 217). In this study, engagement is understood as the feeling of belonging and being committed to an organization and its goals (Wiedmer, 2015). As Pandita and Kumar (2022) discuss, there is very little work in the existing literature about Generation Z and engagement, but a few scholars highlight the importance of this topic being studied (Pandita & Kumar, 2022; Walden et al., 2017). Understanding Generation Z’s behavior and engagement drivers will help leaders better integrate the new employees into the workplace for mutual success (Pandita & Kumar, 2022). A study by Pandita and Kumar (2022) on the engagement of Generation Z employees argue for three main drivers for the engagement of this youngest generational cohort. The first driver is explained as that the manager and employee should start the onboarding process with a detailed agreement of expectations, which creates a strong manager-employee relationship. In line with this Holland et al. (2017) state that supervisory support plays a crucial role in the job engagement of employees in an organization. Secondly, Pandita and Kumar (2022) discuss that Generation Z’s job engagement is strongly affected by the feeling that the organization cares for its employees. A third driver can be stated as co-worker support, where Generation Z prefers to feel that they are working in a team, supporting their peers, and receiving support from their colleagues as well (Aggarwal et al., 2020; Pandita & Kumar, 2022).
2.3 Literature review of soft leadership skills

2.3.1 Leadership theory

Due to the different preferences of leadership found in cohorts, it is important to acknowledge the development and history of leadership as well as leadership styles. As mentioned by Dobrowolski et al. (2022) Generation Z prefers a different style of leadership than previous generations. Additionally, Arsenault (2004) states that one of the possible conflicts between generations lies within different perceptions of management and leadership. Especially the difference in perception of what it means to be a leader and what it takes to be a good leader. Therefore, to understand the perception of leadership from a Generation Z perspective, leadership must be defined.

Looking at the history of leadership, this topic has undergone different phases and developments (Hieker & Pringle, 2021; Nienaber, 2010). Therefore, the development of leadership has been followed and researched frequently. When looking at the development of leadership throughout the years, in particular the two questions “What makes an effective leader?” and “What makes a good leader?” were looked at (Hieker & Pringle, 2021). To broadly summarize the history of leadership, it started with the assumption of the “Great Man Theory” where great leaders are being born and not made. Following on to the importance of developing certain behaviors through leadership training, and subsequently into developing the newest transition from transactional to transformational leadership (Hieker & Pringle, 2021). Additionally, the distinction between managers and leaders has emerged in leadership research through the years. However according to Nienaber (2010), the terms leadership and management are synonymous.

During the first years of the 21st century, the topic of motivation and engagement in leadership took on a new dimension involving the change of perception of hard and soft leadership. This included the importance and issues to keep employees motivated and to promote a high level of engagement at work (Niezurawska et al., 2023). This complements the development and needs in the last century for inspiring leaders. As a consequence, training departments in larger organizations changed their focus from a harder form of leadership to a much more “soft skill” oriented training for leaders (Hieker & Pringle, 2021). Through this change and the importance of leadership within today’s generation, the concept of soft skills should be acknowledged.
2.3.2 Soft skills theory

Soft skills are difficult to define and measure but the term is commonly used nowadays in the working environment because of the increasing interpersonal nature of workplaces (Seemiller & Grace, 2019). Additionally, soft skills are frequently connected with leadership competencies in the academic literature on leadership (AbuJbara & Worley, 2018; Marques, 2013). However, soft skills are considered abstract concepts and difficult to measure (Gerardo et al., 2019; Riggio & Tan, 2014). Due to this, the term soft skills can be interpreted in different ways and the difficulty to find a universal definition arises. Despite the difficulties to find a universal definition, Gerardo et al. (2019) define three main ways to determine soft skills: giving an explicit definition, giving examples of specific soft skills, and comparing them to so-called hard skills.

In general, one way of defining soft skills is focused on intrapersonal skills, which are concerned with the ability to manage oneself, and interpersonal skills, which relate to others, connecting people and social skills (Marin-Zapata et al., 2022). Hurrell et al. (2013) mentioned that “soft skills involve dealing with others and managing oneself and one’s emotions in a manner consistent with particular workplaces and organizations”. They define soft skills as “non-technical and not reliant on abstract reasoning, involving interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities to facilitate mastered performance in particular contexts” (Hurrell et al., 2013). A shorter definition was stated by Davis and Muir (2004) “Soft skills are attitudes and behaviors displayed in interactions among individuals that affect the outcome of such encounters.” Within this research the definition of Hurrell et al. (2013), was selected because it is a well-cited definition (Almonte, 2022; Marin-Zapata et al., 2022; Succi & Canovi, 2020), as well as the suitability for this study because of the involvement of interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities, which are essential within leadership (Davis & Muir, 2004). Due to the complexity of defining soft skills, scholars try to specify soft skills by giving examples of what they consider soft skills. These examples varied between collaboration/teamwork, communication skills, initiative, leadership ability, people development, and personal effectiveness (Crosbie, 2005). According to Gerardo et al. (2019), five skills were mentioned in multiple topic-related articles: communication, teamwork, analytical, organizational, and interpersonal skills. Further characteristics of soft skills in connection with leadership are described in the following subparagraph 2.3.3 Soft leadership skills characteristics.
Another approach that scholars use, is the comparison of soft skills to so-called hard skills, where hard skills are defined by Davis and Muir (2004) as “the technical knowledge and abilities required to perform specific job related tasks”. Most of the research on skills that are required for leadership has focused on hard skills (Hurrell et al., 2013; Marin-Zapata et al., 2022; Riggio & Tan, 2014). Hard skills are analyzing, planning, making decisions, and strategizing. On the other hand, soft skills include the side of leadership that involves motivating, inspiring, and persuading followers, as well as building good relationships and networking (Riggio & Tan, 2014). As mentioned previously, not just defining soft skills arises difficulties, but also the assessment and measurement of soft skills appear to be challenging. However, soft skills are necessary for today’s working environment and especially when being a leader (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Davis and Muir (2004) agree with this statement and mention that leadership requires soft skills to communicate, influence, and delegate. Additionally, Heckman and Kautz (2012) mentioned that soft skills predict success in life and are an important factor for effective leadership. Hind et al. (2009) conducted a study with leading European-based multinational companies and stated in one of the results the importance for respondents for leaders to have a wide variety of soft skills. Concluding it can be said that according to the literature, soft skills are an essential part of leadership and especially when leading a new workforce.

2.3.3 Soft leadership skills characteristics

Focusing on the soft side of leadership, Table 2 below shows an overview of the in literature mentioned soft characteristics of leaders. For example, Crosbie (2005) lists eight interpersonal skills needed by leaders, for instance collaboration/teamwork, communication skills, initiative, leadership ability, people development, and personal effectiveness. Riggio and Tan (2014) extend this by mentioning that the soft side of leadership includes inspiring, building good working relationships, and networking. For Boyatzis et al. (2017) competencies include for example influence and conflict management. Gerardo et al. (2019) mentions five skills in multiple articles: communication, teamwork, analytical, organizational, and interpersonal skills. Succi and Canovi (2020) extend this with for example problem-solving, self-confidence, and ethical understanding. Table 2 represents an extended listing of the most important and used characteristics of soft leadership skills.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Soft leadership skills characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crosbie (2005)</td>
<td>Following are many of the personal and interpersonal skills needed by leaders. Following is a list of eight such skills:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o collaboration/teamwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o communication skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o leadership ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o people development/coaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o personal effectiveness/personal mastery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o planning and organizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o presentation skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riggio &amp; Tan (2014)</td>
<td>The “soft” side of leadership includes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o inspiring,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o motivating,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o persuading followers,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o building good working relationships,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o networking,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o rallying and cajoling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyatzis et al. (2017)</td>
<td>Competencies include:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o achievement orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o organizational awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o conflict management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o teamwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerardo et al. (2019)</td>
<td>At least half of the studies selected mention five skills:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o communication,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o teamwork,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o analytical skills,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o organizational skills,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o interpersonal skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Succi &amp; Canovi (2020)</td>
<td>These soft skills include:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o communication,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o teamwork,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o problem-solving,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o critical and innovative thinking,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o creativity,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o self-confidence,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o ethical understanding,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o capacity for lifelong learning,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o the ability to cope with uncertainty,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o the willingness to accept responsibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When analyzing characteristics of soft leadership skills in literature it becomes clear that the skills of teamwork, communication, and relationships stand out and are repeatedly mentioned by various scholars. As one can see in Table 2 all scholars mention teamwork or building good working relationships. Crosbie (2005); Gerardo et al. (2019); Succi and Canovi (2020) even mention teamwork as one of the first characteristics. Consequently, it can be stated that teamwork is an essential soft skill within leadership. The second most mentioned soft skill in the above-reviewed literature is communication which has been recognized by scholars as one of the most important soft skills in the modern business and working environment (Cuic Tankovic et al., 2022; Succi & Canovi, 2020). Since communication is key within multiple areas in a working environment this skill is influential for multiple other soft leadership skills. The third main characteristic of soft leadership skills is the relationship between the employee and their leader. The topic of relationship covers multiple aspects of soft leadership, such as inspiring and motivating (Riggio & Tan, 2014), influencing (Boyatzis et al., 2017), and ethical understanding (Succi & Canovi, 2020). Consequently, it can be stated that the theoretical perspective shows that teamwork, communication, and relationship are the most discussed characteristics in the literature on soft leadership skills.

2.4 Theoretical lens

This abductive study is viewed through a theoretical lens that emerged from relevant existing literature on soft leadership skills and Generation Z. With this perspective, we analyzed our empirical data, which leads to the results of this study. As the literature review portrays, existing studies discuss Generation Z and leadership characteristics. Nevertheless, we find that the connection between Generation Z and soft leadership skills is under-researched. In addition, existing literature does not address the influence soft leadership skills have on Generation Z employees. Although we find that several scholars underline the importance of leading Generation Z with the softer side of leadership (Grow & Yang, 2018; Seemiller & Grace, 2019), we identify that studies on the influence or the effect of these skills are missing in the literature today. With that in mind, this theoretical lens on preferred soft leadership skills of Generation Z is used to analyze the empirical findings and to complete the identified gap, by investigating the influence of soft leadership skills on Generation Z as employees.
2.4.1 Leadership from Generation Z employees’ perspective

The following paragraph discusses the existing findings of several scholars that have studied leadership in combination with Generation Z. Aziz et al. (2021, p. 2728) argue that “Generation Z expects and is in need of some form of human element woven into their work and team interactions”. In addition to that, Generation Z appreciates leaders, according to literature, that provide a work environment that promotes inclusivity and self-motivation (Aziz et al., 2021). In the below-presented Table 3, various descriptions by scholars are presented to give an overview of what is known about leadership and Generation Z. For example, Grow and Yang (2018) argue that Generation Z is looking for a fair leader, that is flexible, organized, and empathic. Moreover, a leader should be a good listener, friendly and caring with a nice personality (Grow & Yang, 2018). Aziz et al. (2021) underline this by claiming that Generation Z favors a mentor-mentee relationship with their leader since they would like to understand and hear their leaders talking about their own paths. In addition, the literature describes that Generation Z tends to prefer their leader to provide feedback and promote an inclusive work environment (Aziz et al., 2021). Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) describe in their study that a positive attitude and good communication are important characteristics of a leader for Generation Z. Other essential features of an effective leader for Generation Z are described as the opportunity for internal growth, supporting team performance and if they are socially connected with their employees (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021).

Table 3. Leadership preferences of Generation Z

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Ideal Leadership for Generation Z</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grow &amp; Yang (2018, p.13)</td>
<td>Fairness, respect, leads by example, focused on CSR. A leader should be a promoter of work/life balance. Flexible, organized, empathic. A good listener. Friendly, open-minded, and relatable supervisors. Understanding and kindness, which is also expressed as “caring with a nice personality.” “Someone who pushes me to get better.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aziz et al. (2021)</td>
<td>Generation Z wants some form of human element woven into their work and team interactions. A leader needs to provide feedback and promote inclusivity and self-motivation. Generation Z favors a mentor-mentee relationship with their leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabrielova &amp; Buchko (2021)</td>
<td>A leader should have a positive attitude and good communication skills. Giving the opportunity for internal growth, supporting working in a team and their performance. In addition, Generation Z needs to be socially connected with their boss.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.4.2 Leadership characteristics from Generation Z employees’ perspective within this theoretical lens

To narrow down the scope of this study, we created a theoretical lens based on three soft skill characteristics that are regularly mentioned in literature connected to Generation Z and leadership: communication, teamwork, and relationship. It is important to state that each attribute within soft leadership can be defined differently due to the individual perspectives and needs of employees. However, the definitions, findings, and the way Generation Z perceives these characteristics relevant to this study and according to the literature are discussed below.

Communication

One of the main soft leadership skills established out of the systematic overview in Table 2 and Table 3 is communication. Communication settings can vary in today’s working environment from face-to-face, virtual, informal, and formal settings, on a national and international basis as well as with multi-cultural and multi-generation audiences (Jackson, 2013). This leads to, that leaders and employees should be flexible and able to adapt to new situations. Communication is especially interesting regarding Generation Z since the way and preference of how this new cohort likes to communicate differs from previous generations according to literature (Cuic Tankovic et al., 2022). They are used to less face-to-face communication and commonly use virtual communication in the form of texts, emojis, and audio-visual content. Due to this, a lack of communication, like calls or writing emails, and interpersonal skills like listening, has been found by scholars among Generation Z (Cuic Tankovic et al., 2022; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Vadvilavičius & Stelmokienė, 2019). An additional very important factor for leaders guiding Generation Z employees is to communicate feedback. This technology-knowledgeable cohort is used to get constant and immediate feedback (Aggarwal et al., 2020). Through, for example, the use of social media, where the number of likes and comments display positive as well as negative feedback (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). According to the literature, the young workforce wants to communicate regularly about their work performance and can handle direct and constructive communicated criticism (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Additionally, obtaining and communicating feedback from leaders supports organizational commitment (Aggarwal et al., 2020).
**Teamwork**

As emerged from reviewing existing literature on Generation Z and leadership, Generation Z employees seem to place high importance on teamwork. According to the overview of soft leadership skill characteristics in Table 2 and leadership preferences in Table 3, teamwork is an essential skill within leadership. Aziz et al. (2021) underline this by mentioning that Generation Z values the promotion of an inclusive work environment. In addition, studies show that Generation Z prefers to work independently rather than relying on others (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Vadvilavičius & Stelmokienė, 2019). The new generation likes to be in charge of their work tasks, according to the literature, and is oriented to achieve their personal goals while being satisfied with their job (Vadvilavičius & Stelmokienė, 2019). Arar and Öneren (2018) even reported that Generation Z suffers from being a team member, especially when the teamwork is inefficient, and goals are not being achieved at a satisfactory pace. Teamwork is additionally a work value where Generation Z differs from Generation Y. Generation Y perceives teamwork as collaborative rather than competitive as Generation Z does (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). However, Barhate and Dirani (2022) state that Generation Z wants social contact within their work environment. Thereby, networking and good relationships with their co-workers are important as well for Generation Z. Additionally, a supportive work environment for this cohort includes a close-knitted work surrounding with respect and loyalty being essential (Grow & Yang, 2018). This adds up to the statement by Aggarwal et al. (2020) that the new generation prefers to work with a leader, rather than working for a leader. The deniability of working in a team and the need for social contact from a theoretical perspective might seem contradictory. Barhate and Dirani (2022) explain this contradiction as Generation Z having a preference to create personal relationships at work and separate them from professional relationships. In conclusion, scholars stated that Generation Z prefers to work independently and rely on themselves to achieve goals but still desires the promotion of teamwork and social contacts to achieve holistic professional goals (Aggarwal et al., 2020; Aziz et al., 2021; Barhate & Dirani, 2022).

**Relationships**

The third soft leadership skill that is derived from existing literature, is having a strong relationship with the leader. It becomes clear in both Table 2 and Table 3 that many scholars state that a strong relationship between the employee and their leader is important for Generation Z. For example, Grow and Yang (2018) argue that Generation Z performs well if
they have a personal relationship and a social connection with their leader. In line with that, Aziz et al. (2021) argue that Generation Z is not only in need of a strong relationship with their leader but in general needs to develop meaningful relationships at their workplace to feel engaged. Scholars express that Generation Z describes a personal relationship as one where the leader has empathy for their employees, is understanding, and is caring with a friendly personality. Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) add that mutual support, trust, and respect are characteristics of an effective supervisor-subordinate relationship for Generation Z.

Another noteworthy finding in existing literature, in favor of strong relationships between Generation Z and their leaders, is that Generation Z expects their supervisor to provide them with guidance influencing their learning and career growth through meaningful mentorships (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). According to Fodor and Jaeckel (2018), Generation Z expresses a desire to look up to successful people to motivate their behavior in a work environment, which can be found in a mentor and role model. Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) underline this and explain that this new generational cohort wishes for mentorship and is more engaged in working for leaders who are willing to talk about their own paths and reflect on this in a mentor-mentee relationship. This is underlined in the systematic literature review by Barhate and Dirani (2022), where it is argued that Generation Z’s expectation of having a meaningful relationship with their leaders is built upon their leader or supervisor playing a mentoring role in Generation Z’s career development (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Iorgulescu, 2016; Maloni et al., 2019).
3. Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology of this research. Starting with the research philosophy where the ontology and epistemology will be presented, followed up by the research approach. Subsequently, this chapter provides our research design, where the methods and techniques of this research are presented. To be complete, the method of data collection and data analysis is explained, followed by an elaboration on the data quality to ensure the credibility of this research. Finally, this methodology chapter presents our research ethics.

To explain how our empirical study has been carried out, this chapter focuses on the methodological dimensions of our study. Figure 1 portrays an overview of the breakdown of the methods and techniques used in this study, which this chapter will be elaborated on subsequently.

Figure 1. Research methodology visualized
3.1 Research philosophy

In this research philosophy, we discuss the relativist ontology and the social constructionism epistemology of our study, as well as the understanding of the roots of our research design. In this section we describe the ontology, our underlying perception of reality, and the epistemology, our belief in what knowledge is and how it is created (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). The two concepts of ontology and epistemology build the foundation of our research design and allow the following dimensions to form a strategy to answer our research question.

Ontology is, according to Easterby-Smith et al. (2021), our philosophical assumption about the nature of reality. It describes and provides the perspective and existence of reality. Depending on how truth is perceived, the ontological assumption can be viewed from four different positions: realism, internal realism, relativism, and nominalism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). These four positions can be described on a scale spectrum, where realists on the far-left side of the spectrum believe in the existence of one single truth that can only be accessed through careful observations. On the far right side of the spectrum, nominalists argue for the absence of truth by claiming that facts are purely created by humans (Saunders et al., 2019). In our research, we take a perspective from a rather middle view, namely relativism, as we believe in the existence of many truths and facts depending on the viewpoints of individuals (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). To study the perspective of Generation Z employees and the influence of soft leadership skills on their motivation and engagement, our main interest is to gather multiple viewpoints and opinions. Hence, all individuals participating in this research represent different perspectives and viewing points and thus this research is based on multiple truths. Moreover, it is important to recognize that different ontologies impact the way of formulating and posing questions (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). In this study, we have mainly made use of ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions to get a comprehensive understanding of the individual perspectives that our research participants illustrate. On a critical note towards a relativism ontology, Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) argue that even though the truth of scientific laws is independent of the process of discovery, there is a difference between the scientific truth of the ‘laws of physics’ and ‘laws of management’. The scholars argue that management is a social phenomenon and might not comply with natural scientific truths. Nevertheless, from our relativist ontological stance, we view the ‘laws of management’ as truthful, and therefore this ontology is found to be most suitable for our study.
The second concept in the research philosophy is epistemology, which Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) describe as the study of the nature of knowledge and where knowledge originates from. Epistemological assumptions vary foremost between two opposing ends: positivism and social constructionism. From a positivist stance, knowledge is created by an external world, and it can only be developed by observations and objective methods (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Social constructionists, on the other hand, argue that knowledge is not created by objective externality but rather from a socially constructed world, shaped by daily interactions of individuals (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). In other words, social constructionism believes in knowledge creation from opinions, written and spoken words, and the context of individuals (Saunders et al., 2019). We adopt the social constructionist perspective as this study’s epistemology. This becomes clear in how we appreciate the variety of viewpoints and opinions of our research participants, in our case employees belonging to Generation Z. Our research phenomenon is based on the different perspectives of our research participants, which leads to us putting great emphasis on encouraging freedom of thought. In this way, we can understand and grasp the essence of the opinions of Generation Z employees. We additionally support a social constructionist approach by acknowledging that our topic is developed through a socially constructed world and is shaped by individuals. This is especially represented through the daily social interactions between the leader, employee, and team members at work. The effect of these social interactions is represented in our study in the different perspectives of our participants on their individual leaders. From a critical standpoint, social constructionism is known to be depending on the interpretation of the data by the researcher. This might increase the difficulty of interpreting data from several sources (Saunders et al., 2019). Nevertheless, we take the standing of social constructionists since we bring in multiple perspectives by exploring several data sources and checking the validity of these, also known as triangulation. According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2021), this is in line with our social constructionist stance on epistemology.

3.2 Research strategy

3.2.1 Research approach

Our study, with the philosophical assumption of a relativist ontology and a social constructionist epistemology, follows a qualitative approach where we study the perceptions of our research participants: Generation Z employees. Scholars have the option to follow either quantitative, qualitative, or mixed method approaches in their research. The choice of research
approach influences the way how the research data will be collected, analyzed, and comprehended (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021; Saunders et al., 2019). A qualitative research approach is found to be the most suitable for our study since we aim to grasp the perspectives and experiences of individuals. Collecting this in a non-numeric form allows us to understand the experiences and viewing points of our research participants. A critical view of qualitative research is that by use of qualitative data collection methods, like interviews, it is most likely that the sample unit is relatively small (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). This leads to that the findings of a qualitative study are difficult to generalize for a larger group, in our case for example Generation Z. Nevertheless, we found a qualitative approach to be the most suitable since we can get an in-depth insight into our participant’s perspectives.

This study follows an abductive research approach, which can be seen in the continuous back-and-forth movement between empirical observations and theory within our data analysis. Through this, an understanding of both theory and empirical phenomena is created which is advantageous within this case research (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Saunders et al. (2019) emphasize how research involves the use of theory, and outline that according to how theory is used, research can either be deductive, inductive, or abductive. A deductive approach is often used in quantitative research, with a positivist epistemology where the theory that is studied already exists. An inductive approach, on the other hand, aims to build new a theory from empirically gathered data and allows for the construction of reality through subjective perceptions, and is often associated with qualitative research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). A third approach is an abductive approach, which is explained as a combination of deduction and induction (Saunders et al., 2019). In our study, we follow an abductive approach because there is a limited amount of existing research on the topic of the influence of soft leadership skills on motivation and engagement of Generation Z as employees. We will contribute to research by developing new knowledge and adding to existing theory through our data generation, and therefore an abductive approach is the most suitable for our study. Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) highlight a critical perspective on abduction, where abductive research methods have not yet been used frequently in academic research, which might cause uncertainty. Nevertheless, since we aim to base our research on adding new knowledge combining and building upon previous known phenomena, we find an abductive method the most suitable for our research.

Out of the four described research purposes by Saunders et al. (2019), which depend on the nature of the research design, our study has an exploratory research purpose. Other research purposes as discussed by Saunders et al. (2019) are descriptive, explanatory, and evaluative.
The purpose of research determines the intention of the study, and with what outcome the results are generated. A study with an exploratory purpose has the intention of exploring outcomes, rather than finding a solution. Usually, according to Saunders et al. (2019), exploratory studies are conducted to study not yet-known phenomena. For our study, an exploratory purpose is relevant because the topic of the influence of soft leadership skills on motivation and engagement of Generation Z as employees is under-researched. As underlined in the previous chapters, Generation Z has just started to enter the workforce. This logically leads to that Generation Z as employees is an under-researched topic and more knowledge about this generational cohort in a work environment is needed (Aggarwal et al., 2020; Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Hurrelmann & Albrecht, 2021; Niezurawska et al., 2023; Seemiller & Grace, 2019). Through an exploratory study, we develop new knowledge and add to existing theories that underline the purpose of our research. This research strategy allows us to conduct the study with open questions, where we discover the insights of individuals on our topic of the influence of soft leadership skills on the motivation and engagement of Generation Z at work.

3.2.2 A case study research design

To be able to answer our research question, in line with our relativist ontological beliefs and constructionist epistemological assumptions, we conduct a single case study. This research design, according to Easterby-Smith et al. (2021), is the logical outcome of what we have defined earlier in our philosophical assumptions and research approach definition of this study. By conducting case studies, in-depth insights into a phenomenon or topic within its real-life setting are explored. A case, which can be a person, a group, or as in our study an organization, generates insights through intensive and in-depth research which leads to the development of theory (Saunders et al., 2019).

This study conducts a holistic single case study since it allows for an in-depth investigation and understanding of the studied phenomenon. Single case studies involve insightful investigation of one particular entity, such as an individual or organization (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). According to Saunders et al. (2019), another important aspect of a case study is to understand the context of the phenomenon taking place, which is applied in our study by investigating the perspective and views of the generational cohort Z as employees. In this research, we will study the influence of soft leadership skills on the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees at Ernst & Young (hereafter: EY). We approach our single case, within EY in a
holistic way where we consider the organization as a whole, rather than as many individual departments (Saunders et al., 2019). Within a case study an integrated approach is necessary to grasp the main difficulty of the study (Dubois & Gadde, 2002), which comes forward in our approach to our case as a whole instead of looking at the division of departments or geographical locations. It also has to be mentioned that a case study approach has not always been recognized as a proper scientific method because case studies provide little basis for scientific generalization (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). However, since we are interested in the individual perspectives of Generation Z employees at EY it is the most suitable research approach for this study.

Within this single case study, we focus on the assurance, consulting, strategy, transactions, and tax service company, Ernst & Young (EY). Since this study focuses on Generation Z employees, a company that employs a young workforce was searched for. Through EY’s highly known acceptance of new graduates and the fact that 70% of total hires within EY are under 30 years old (EYGM, 2022), the company was selected. EY has over 700 offices in 150 countries and employs about 365,000 people worldwide (EYGM, 2022). Their purpose is “building a better working world” (EYGM, 2022, p. 2), which implies their focus on the development of their working environment. Additionally, most of the values that EY represents align with the soft skills that were researched in this study. For example, EY states that “We are [...] people who demonstrate integrity, respect, teaming, and inclusiveness” (EYGM, 2022, p. 2). This aligns with soft skills like teamwork and relationships. In addition, to create a holistic single case study the company is seen as a whole. This was supported by the fact that EY is known to have similar leadership structures regardless of the location. Throughout our data analysis, it was proven that within EY all entry-level employees have a counselor that supports them through guidance and leadership. This did not differentiate between departments and countries which supports our choice of a holistic view. In conclusion, the young workforce and openness to new graduates as well as the company’s purpose, value, and leadership structure supported our decision to focus on EY within our single case study.

3.3 Method

In this qualitative study, we apply two data collection approaches: semi-structured interviews and company documents. The primary data is collected through semi-structured interviews with the sampling group Generation Z employees, to get a comprehensive understanding of how the samples experience the influence of soft leadership skills on motivation and
engagement. Moreover, we have collected secondary data through PowerPoint presentations, reports, and articles from EY. The combination of these data collection methods and the use of member checks allows us to apply triangulation in our research and to further enhance the quality of the data used in this research (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

The primary data, which is defined as the essential information that researchers generate first-hand for their studies (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), is in our study collected through semi-structured interviews. This data collection technique allows us to understand the personal perspectives and experiences of individuals within a case (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), which is relevant to our exploratory research purpose. It is important for our study to perform semi-structured-based interviews since these follow an approximate structure while also offering the possibility to improvise follow-up questions (Saunders et al., 2019). The use of improvised questions, next to our structured questions, gave us the chance to get a more comprehensive understanding of the participant’s perspectives. Thereby, during the interviews, we felt that the participants were willing to share more valuable insights beyond our structured questions. The first questions of the interviews were introduction questions about the participants’ roles and teams within the company. Whereas the actual role of the participant is not important for the findings of our study, these questions aimed to create a safe environment and a starting point from which the participant would feel comfortable sharing personal experiences. As Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) argue, semi-structured interviews can be discussed and criticized for missing objectivity as they lack a level of standardization compared to structured interviews. Nevertheless, taking our research purpose into consideration, semi-structured interviews are the right fit for our study.

Taking a closer look at the structure of our interviews, we strove to originate the questions from the theoretical lens and our research purpose. Before the interviews were conducted, we created interview questions, grouped into several sections, that were used while conducting the interviews. This grouping of interview questions is beneficial for the structure of the interview since it creates a clear overview and logical flow of the questions (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Our interview questions, which can be found in Appendix A, consist therefore of five sections: (1) background information, (2) soft leadership skills, (3) motivation of Generation Z and the influence of soft leadership skills, (4) engagement of Generation Z and the influence of soft leadership skills and (5) round-off questions. The questions were foremost phrased and
structured as “how”- and “why”-questions. Moreover, we created interview guidelines which we sent to the participants before the interview (Appendix B). All interviews have been conducted via Microsoft Teams. We identified this as the most suitable setting since our participants are in different locations within Europe, and this made sure neither they nor we had to travel. Thereby, conducting the interviews online allowed the interview participants to remain rather anonymous since they had the option to turn off their cameras. Nevertheless, all interview participants had their cameras turned on during our interviews. However, it must be mentioned that through online interviews the ability to read and acknowledge body language decreases.

To minimize the risk of personal bias, which is known to be a recurring problem in qualitative research according to Saunders et al. (2019), both researchers were present during all interviews. The different sections of the interview were divided between the two interviewing researchers, to make the interviews dynamic and enhance the active participation of all parties. As soon as the interviews were done, we had a short discussion via phone- or Microsoft Teams call, to erase misunderstandings and false reporting. In this exchange of thoughts, we discussed our feeling about the interview, gave feedback to each other, and made sure to discuss potential changes to our interview guidelines. The first three interviews were used as pilot interviews, whereafter we took a critical look at the interview guideline and the way the participants responded to our questions. After this round of feedback, we decided not to change any of the questions or the structure of our interview questions. Nevertheless, we highlighted some parts of the questions that we placed more emphasis on in the following interviews, or that required more explanation. Especially the section explaining the difference between the definitions of motivation and engagement needed more attention. After the interviews, we made sure to reach out to the participants with a thank you message and a reminder of that we were still looking for secondary data sources. After we identified our empirical findings, we performed member checks to ensure that the statements made by our participants were accurate and aligned with what they intended to say. After the interview process, it became clear that all 13 interviews lasted on average around 40 minutes, with the shortest interview being 32 minutes and the longest interview 51 minutes. The total recording time is 8 hours and 52 minutes. All this recorded data has been transcribed, which leads to a total number of 162 pages of transcription. After the last interview, no new knowledge was identified and therefore the point of saturation of this study was reached. However, to generate the best possible outcome for this study secondary data was consulted to add an additional contribution to this study. Out of all
conducted interviews, one interview was excluded from this research, because this participant turned out to be a part-time employee at EY. This led to the generated data being too divergent from the other participants that are full-time employees.

3.3.2 Official company documents
Within this case study, secondary data was collected by analyzing official EY company documents. One of these data sources was derived from a PowerPoint presentation that we received from an interview participant (archival material, company document, 2020). The presentation involved EY’s transformative leadership model and values displayed in a consulting behavior chart. Out of this presentation, especially behaviors regarding teamwork were interesting for this study. Additionally, reports and articles from EY’s website were used as secondary data. As an example, the Annual Report of 2022 with the title “How can value realized today reshape tomorrow?” (EYGM, 2022) was analyzed to elaborate on the leadership values and overall view of EY. In addition, EY articles related to Generation Z were analyzed and used. One suitable article related to this study elaborates on the influence of Generation Z in the workplace and the need to understand this cohort’s unique characteristics for employers, markets, and business leaders (EY, 2020). Another suitable article regarding Generation Z named “Next-gen workforce: secret weapon or biggest challenge” (EY, 2016), was about the differences between generations and what changes Generation Z will bring. These articles and reports gave an insight into EY’s view on the new generational cohort as well as how they perceive Generation Z’s way of working. Additionally, through the documents, an understanding of EY’s values implemented in their leadership strategies could be developed.

3.3.3 Sampling strategy
To obtain relevant data sources, we applied both purposive- and snowball sampling to acquire interview participants and gather official company documents. For our interviews, we chose to apply purposive- and snowball sampling, in line with our qualitative research approach. Applying this to our study, it became clear that our sample unit is Generation Z employees that work at EY. Earlier in this research we determined that the scope of Generation Z is defined as those born between 1995 and 2010. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the sample unit of this study focuses on Generation Z as employees and therefore the target group is Generation Z born between 1995 and 2005. This allowed us to exclusively interview participants who, by the time this study was conducted, were 18 years and older. Our sample unit was selected regardless of the participant’s gender, experience, or role within the company.
To reach out to participants, we consulted both our LinkedIn networks to get an understanding of how many people we have in our network that fit our sample unit. We sent 114 messages via direct message on LinkedIn to our first connections and second connections (connections of connections). 94 people did not reply, and nine people that did reply were interested, but unfortunately did not fit the sample unit because they were born in 1994 for example. From these messages, we received eleven replies from interested people which all led to an interview. This technique, called purposive sampling, is applied because the people that we approached were screened to see if they fit the criteria for inclusion in our sample unit (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Another approach to our sampling method was that we posted a public post on both our LinkedIn accounts, that described our research purpose and called for participants. From this method, we got one reply that also led to an interview. Finally, the last two participants were acquired by a sampling technique called snowball sampling, where we received the contact information of these two people from people that fit our criteria for inclusion (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). This technique led to two contacts that both led to an interview. Table 4 shows an overview of our interview participants, the interview duration, and their corresponding years of birth. Regarding the official company documents, we received an EY PowerPoint presentation from an interview participant. Other secondary data sources like reports and articles from EY were derived from EY’s website.

Table 4. Interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Year of birth</th>
<th>Interview duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I1</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>47:55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I2</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>48:35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I3</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>36:47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I4</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>36:33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I5</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>35:31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I6</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>40:55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I7</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>41:09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I8</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>51:31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I9</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>45:58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I10</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>32:25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I11</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>38:03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I12</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>35:29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I13</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>37:05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total interview time</td>
<td>8 hours, 52 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4 Data analysis

Following our qualitative case study research approach, we aim to develop and add new knowledge by analyzing Generation Z’s perspective on how soft leadership skills influence their motivation and engagement, emerging from our gathered data. Both our primary- and secondary data are analyzed according to the Gioia method (Gioia et al., 2013). This method presents a structured technique of analyzing qualitative data, especially for inductive and abductive research approaches, and therefore this method was found to be a suitable data analysis method for this study. The conduction of our primary data, through semi-structured interviews, enabled us to understand and explore the first-hand experiences and perspectives of our participants. The secondary-data sources, official company documents, created another dimension to the data that was collected during and after the interviews. We build up our data description on these two data sources and after crafting the data, we consistently followed Gioia’s three steps of analysis (Gioia et al., 2013). By following this data structure, a clear understanding of the concepts and findings is created (Gioia et al., 2013). However, here it must be mentioned that qualitative research methods are criticized for lacking scholarly rigor and the fact that researcher can select their statements and data that is in line with their message (Gehman et al., 2018). Within this study, we tried to avoid this by checking each other’s transcriptions, and performing the coding process together.

Before the first step of Gioia’s analysis method, we transcribed the recorded interviews using the transcription function of Microsoft Teams to have the interviews in written words. Thereafter we listened to the recording of the interviews and corrected mistakes that had a significant impact on the findings. Subsequently, we formulated statements from the transcribed interviews into empirical observations (Saldaña, 2015). These empirical observations were added to an Excel sheet to log the raw data and to get an overview of the statements made. In Figure 2, examples of empirical observations are presented to support the spoken words of participants. In the first step, we coded the empirical observation out of the primary- and secondary data into so-called first order codes. We strove to use the language of the participants, to better understand their perspective in the data analysis, and identified 25 first order codes. In the second step, we created second order themes, where we searched for similarities and differences amongst the coded sequences and combined segments of descriptions that reflected similarities. Here we aimed to align the statements with revised literature to formulate the second order themes. Through the linkage of our literature review and the findings, eight second order themes were identified. As the last step, we enhanced our
themes identified in the second order into *third order aggregate dimensions*. This third step visualized the results of the collected data by summarizing the findings into three third order aggregate dimensions. The full coding scheme is visualized in Figure 2. Based on our analysis, we developed our model, Figure 3, which visualizes the relationship between the themes and dimensions. By transforming the identified data structure into a model, we explain our phenomenon of the influence of soft leadership skills on the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees visually. The process of data analysis was done together, and we decided collaboratively on the codes, themes, and dimensions. We revised the identified codes multiple times to minimize the risk of bias.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empirical observations</th>
<th>First order codes</th>
<th>Second order themes</th>
<th>Third level aggregate dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Good communication makes it clear and more easy for everyone</td>
<td>Communication from leader is motivating factor</td>
<td>Face-to-face communication from leader is motivating and engaging Generation Z</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Communication I think is crucial, how I should do my tasks, what I'm doing good, how I can improve and put me in the right direction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Communication is always the golden rule</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● If there is no communication from top to bottom and you feel like you have no idea what the company is doing [...] I think there is no way that you feel [...] engaged to the company or the this specific client</td>
<td>Communication from leader is engaging factor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Not just saying ‘ohh do this worksheet and you'll figure it out’, but really explaining the significance to me is important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● What's motivating me is when the leaders have ensured me like ‘you can do it’ and then I can look at it and we can go through it together</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● My boss, fully motivated me because he was saying you can do it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I think that it's really appreciated when our leaders give us feedback</td>
<td>Feedback is motivating</td>
<td>Feedback is important to motivate and engage Generation Z</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● That's nice to have that confirmation that you're doing right.</td>
<td>Feedback is engaging</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Empathy, that [the leader] cares what is going on in your team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Caring about your colleagues, your team members, I think that's a strong leadership skill to show that you care about your team</td>
<td>A caring leader is important</td>
<td>An empathic leader is motivating and engaging Generation Z</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I think like them checking in on the on my well-being that also like inspires me to do better at work.</td>
<td>A caring leader is motivating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● We're getting more individualistic, so the ability to adapt to [the employee], because like one size doesn't fit all anymore</td>
<td>Knowing your employees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● We had a pretty strong relationship [...] which also affected my performance</td>
<td>Good relationship with leader is important</td>
<td>Social connection with leader is important to Generation Z</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● A very open and honest relationship is important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● It motivates me to do better if we [the employee and the leader] have that relationship where we're comfortable in speaking to each other</td>
<td>Good relationship with leader is motivating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I felt like the leader trusted me a bit more, so that made me more motivated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● If you have a stronger relationship then it's more engaging</td>
<td>Good relationship with leader is engaging</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● [The leader] gave me more responsibility based on that we have a good personal relationship and that I have been able to show that he can trust me with some extra tasks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● It's a balance between having a good and happy team and then also being able to meet deadlines and do what's required</td>
<td>Balanced relationship with leader is important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I was very motivated at work because I was given more responsibility and was able to be more engaged within the project</td>
<td>Responsibility from leader is motivating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● [A leader with strong soft skills] is definitively something I prefer and is also more the thing with our generation.</td>
<td>Preference for leader with strong soft skills</td>
<td>Leadership soft skills are important for Generation Z</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I would definitely prefer working with a leader that has better soft skills than hard skills.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● As a leader you need to feel what's needed and be able to shift the soft skills and the hard skills</td>
<td>Balance between soft and hard skills is important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● For motivation and engagement I would say everything comes down to how valuable I feel at work</td>
<td>Feeling valuable and doing valuable work</td>
<td>Feeling valuable and doing valuable work is motivating and engaging Generation Z</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● [It is motivating] when you are valuable to the team and that you are contributing to the final results</td>
<td>Feeling valuable and doing valuable work is motivating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I'm feeling engaged almost every day and I guess that's when you feel like you are doing something for another person</td>
<td>Feeling valuable and doing valuable work is engaging</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● The most important part is not just work, but the people that you work with</td>
<td>Friendly work environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Leaders that promote this type of open environment is very important.</td>
<td>Leader promotes supportive work environment</td>
<td>Work environment is important to Generation Z</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● EY leaders are focused on ensuring that opportunities are equitable, differences are valued, people feel supported, and all voices are heard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● [The leader] promotes that you are inclusive with fellow colleagues</td>
<td>An inclusive environment is motivating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I think that is something we value, that there is not these untouchable people in the firm.</td>
<td>Non-hierarchical order is important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I like to perform in teams and do it together. You can share the happiness when you did something good. That motivates me.</td>
<td>Good teamwork is motivating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● A good relationship with your team makes your feel engaged</td>
<td>Good teamwork is engaging</td>
<td>Teamwork is important to motivate and engage Generation Z</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I believe: “If we win, I win” and sell “the whole of the firm,” asking “who else will I bring with me (from EY, from our alliances, the broader ecosystem) to successfully deliver for my client?”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.5 Trustworthiness

3.5.1 Credibility

Credibility is the parallel to internal validity and regarding the question: “How can one establish confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings of a particular inquiry for the respondents with which and the context in which the inquiry was carried out?” (Guba, 1981, p. 79). In general, internal validity refers to the extent that research findings contribute to the research rather than deficiencies in the research design. In our research, we ensure credibility through triangulation. Triangulation deals with a variety of different techniques or methods to collect data to cross-check the data and interpretations (Guba, 1981). Within a single and holistic case study, the combination of sources of evidence is essential (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). During our study we collected a variety of data, through conducting interviews with EY employees and documents from EY regarding soft leadership skills and Generation Z. Additionally, the various perspectives and data given from individuals were supported through member checks. Member checks during the research process intend to test data and interpretation that was derived from different members of groups (Guba, 1981). This combination of sources and therefore triangulation allows us to understand Generation Z’s experiences as employees and their perspective on the influence of soft leadership skills on their motivation and engagement. In addition, to assure their belonging to our target group Generation Z, every participant was asked to state their year of birth before starting with the interview questions. Additionally, after the data collection, one interview was excluded due to the unsuitability of the research group as well as the interpretation of the presented data, as this participant was working part-time and was not fully employed at EY.

3.5.2 Transferability

Within the context of transferability as the parallel to external validity, the concerned question is: “Can a study’s research findings be generalized to other relevant contexts?” (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 216). Meaning that the findings will have relevance within different settings and conditions of other studies. Transferability was provided in our study by a detailed description of the research background (1.1), research purpose (1.3), research design (3.3), as well as data collection (3.4) and data analysis (3.5). Through these detailed descriptions, also called “thick descriptions”, room is created for other researchers to transfer the study to another setting and context (Saunders et al., 2019). According to Guba (1981), generalization intends to maximize the variety of information uncovered. Within this study, the purpose was to grasp the
perspective of Generation Z on soft leadership skills. Through this, the focus was on similarities between individuals belonging to Generation Z and the attempt to generalize.

3.5.3 Dependability

Dependability deals with the replicability of a study and is the parallel criterion to reliability. Reliability is given when researchers can replicate a study that has been conducted before and achieve the same findings (Saunders et al., 2019). Here we displayed a detailed description of the research progress to understand and evaluate the context and changes that have been made. Within our study, the methodology and procedure have been stated in detail to be able to follow along. Additionally, to ensure the dependability of this study an audit trail was documented (Guba, 1981). This audit trail was documented in the form of a total of 162 pages of transcription and a visualization of the empirical data (Figure 2) to be able to get an overview of the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data.

3.5.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is concerned with the neutrality of researchers (Guba, 1981). This involves the above-mentioned triangulation of collecting data, as has been done in our study by using various data sources and perspectives as well as member checks. Additionally, the practice of reflexivity was made by intentionally revealing our epistemological assumption to avoid personal bias and maintain neutrality (Guba, 1981). This was put into practice by frequently stating to our interviewees that we are interested in their personal perspectives and their individual truths. With the acknowledgment of the role of being researchers and reflection on the influence of interpretations and relationships, neutrality was supported. Additionally, during the interviews, steering interviewees in a particular direction was avoided and only follow-up questions were asked when misunderstandings arose, or clarifications were needed. During the data analysis, neutrality was ensured through cross-checking of findings and coding. In addition, the reflection of a third-party perspective on the research process was involved to minimize personal bias.

3.6 Research ethics

Since our study is conducted within the field of social research, ethical considerations are essential throughout the research process to underline the trustworthiness, quality, and accuracy of this study. We followed the principles of Bell and Bryman (2007) to assure the guarantee of the integrity of our study and to protect the participant’s interests.
To assure that our research did not harm or do wrong to our research participants, precautionary measures were conducted. Before the interviews, we sent out an interview guideline with a description of this research topic as well as a short explanation of the topics that were being asked (Appendix B). Through this, we created a mutual understanding of our research. Additionally, to assure informed consent we sent a Non-Disclosure Agreement (hereafter: NDA) (Appendix C) informing participants about the General Data Protection Regulations (hereafter: GDPR) and withdrawal of the information provided. The NDA was signed and sent back to us before interviewing the participants. At the beginning of the interviews, we introduced ourselves and defined our research topic to clarify misunderstandings. Additionally, GDPR rules and withdrawal of information were defined again, and consent to record the interview was asked. Through this, we created a respectful, open-minded, and honest environment to support the comfort of the participants and to develop trust. After this verbal confirmation and agreement, we started the recording of the interviews for transcription.

To protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the research it was stated that no personal data, except for their birthyear to clarify their belonging to Generation Z, will be mentioned and data will be secured and analyzed anonymously to avoid harmful events such as victimization (Bell & Bryman, 2007). We additionally stated that we do not conduct our study on behalf of EY. Thus, no funding or informational exchange with EY was involved. To assure the dignity of the participants we stated multiple times that we are interested in their perspectives and that every answer is valuable. Through active listening and minimization of interruptions of the participants, we underlined a supportive environment. Both researchers were present and active for all interviews to avoid misunderstanding and false reporting. Additionally, discussions about personal viewpoints were held to find a common understanding of the research data. In conclusion, it must be mentioned that even though we tried to create a non-harmful environment, Bell and Bryman (2007) state that the possibility of removing all potential risks of harm is unrealizable.
4. Findings

In this chapter, the findings are described and explained. The findings are represented through quotations from the conducted interviews as well as company documents. Furthermore, the connection between the findings will be elaborated on. We have categorized our empirical data in three-level order themes, which creates a structured reviewing method.

The empirical findings are structured around three major areas: communication, relationship, and a supportive work environment. From the findings, key aspects in each area emerged on how soft leadership skills influence the motivation and engagement of our Generation Z participants. These findings are discussed subsequently in this chapter according to the three key aspects. Additionally, all findings are illustrated in a visual model, that can be found in the subchapter data analysis, Figure 2.

4.1 Communication

It becomes clear from our empirical data that communication from their leader is key to motivate and engage Generation Z as employees. This includes face-to-face communication skills as well as providing feedback.

4.1.1 Face-to-face communicational skilled leader is motivating and engaging Generation Z

The findings display that most interviewees agree that face-to-face communication from their leader is crucial for them to be motivated and engaged at work. “Communication I think is crucial, how I should do my tasks, what I'm doing good, how I can improve and put me in the right direction” (INT 4). The participants discussed how clear communication from their leaders not only makes them motivated but also creates an open communicational sphere between the employee and their leaders. This is important for the employees to feel that they always can talk with their leader, which is a factor in how much they will enjoy their work. “If the leader can communicate with everyone and make the team communicate, then you feel more motivated [...] which I think is very important to enjoy going to work” (INT 7). Nearly all interviewees express that they feel particularly motivated when their leader explains their task well and communicates what is expected from them. As one of the interviewees expressed: “If they [the leaders] don't explain things, then I feel a bit less motivated because I have to figure out by myself how to do things” (INT 10). This shows that Generation Z employees value the freedom to have their own responsibility for a task, even if it is a more complicated task, but
that it requires clear explanations of the task from their leaders to be motivated to perform well in their task. “But there was one time where the manager wasn't communicating that much or as much as you would normally expect. And then you were feeling like [...] you don't know what to do. Obviously, this can be somewhat demotivational” (INT 13). Our data showed that Generation Z feels engaged in their task, their work, and the company when they get insight into the organization as a whole and their leader communicates the bigger picture. It is important that the leaders communicate the purpose of their task, and when the employee feels like they contribute to a bigger goal they feel engaged. As one participant discussed: “In an organization, [...] if there is no communication from top to bottom you feel like you have no idea what the company is doing or what the manager is doing [...] I think there is no way that you feel engaged to the company or to this specific client” (INT 13). Another participant underlined the significance of this: “Not just saying like ‘ohh do this worksheet and look at the prior year and you'll figure it out’, but really explaining the significance to me is important” (INT 11).

Another important finding in terms of communication shows that Generation Z would like their leader to motivate them with inspirational verbal communication. We find that many participants feel valued and motivated when their leader expresses that the employee completed a task in a good way or if they bring new, innovative thoughts and solutions. One participant expressed that “What's motivating me [...] [is when] some of the leaders have ensured me like you can do [it] and then I can look at it and we can go through it together” (INT 10). The importance of this finding also becomes clear in: “My operative boss fully motivated me because he was saying ‘you can do it’” (INT 9).

4.1.2 Feedback is important to motivate and engage Generation Z

Our data makes it evident how receiving feedback from their leader is a strongly motivating and engaging factor for Generation Z employees. The participants state that they feel more confident in their work when they know that they are on a good way or get confirmation about successfully fulfilling their tasks. This means, that it is appreciated by Generation Z when their leaders provide them with constructive feedback: “I think that it's really appreciated when our leaders give us feedback” (INT 3) and “… it is nice to have that confirmation that you're doing right” (INT 10). It is important to mention, that one participant discussed that it is necessary for their motivation that they receive both positive and constructive feedback, instead of only hearing what they did wrong. This becomes clear in a statement from one of the participants:
“If a person says 10 good things and one bad thing you always think about the bad thing, so more positive feedback would be good” (INT 7). Although many participants highlighted the importance of feedback, not all participants brought this up during the interviews, and therefore the need for feedback is not extensively present. Moreover, it is clear that feedback is important for Generation Z’s security and feeling of doing the right thing: “It is nice when you're doing something you're not certain about, and then they say you, you did a great job and this looks really good” (INT 11).

4.2 Relationship

Another important factor portrays the importance of the relationship between Generation Z employees and their leaders. Throughout the collection of empirical data, it became clear that having an empathic leader, a social connection with the leader, and soft leadership skills are essential factors for the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees.

4.2.1 An empathic leader is motivating and engaging Generation Z

It becomes evident that an empathic leader is motivating and engaging Generation Z participants. Being empathic can be expressed as, according to our empirical data, when the leader cares about their employees and wants to get to know them. The importance of the soft leadership skill caring was portrayed by one of the participants: “Caring, like caring about your colleagues, your team members, I think that's a strong leadership skill to show that you care like, about your team” (INT 3). Another participant underlined this: “Empathy, that you care what is going in your team” (INT 7). This skill implies that the leader checks in on the employee’s well-being and is interested not just in their work life but also in their personal life. This implies not just talking about work but also about personal or social topics. For example, another participant mentioned: “She was always communicating with me not only about work but also personal life and trying to guide me and seeing if I like was doing fine, if the workload, if it was too much or too little” (INT 6). Additionally, the check-ins with their leader and asking them questions regarding their well-being were motivating and inspiring factors. For example, a participant mentioned: “I think like them checking in on the on my well-being that also like inspires me to do better at work” (INT 6). Another important factor for the motivation and engagement of Generation Z is that the leader knows their employees and can adapt to their individual goals and needs. “We're getting more individualistic, so the ability to adapt to like the mentee or your worker because like one size doesn't fit all anymore” (INT 7).
4.2.2 Social connection with leader is important to Generation Z

Another important factor that comes forward out of our empirics is the preference for a social connection between Generation Z participants and the leaders. To have a good social connection, referred to as relationship, with the leader involves soft skills like being respectful, open, and honest with each other. For example: “It motivates me to do better if we have that relationship where we're comfortable in speaking to each other” (INT 6), and “If you have a stronger relationship then it's also more engaging to help out” (INT 7). Additionally, a good and strong relationship with the leader influences the performance of employees. As one participant mentioned: “We had a pretty strong relationship because of that, which also affected how I performed. So I believe that if we would not have had that relationship I would not have performed the same way that I did” (INT 6). Especially communication plays a major role in the process of building a close connection between leader and employee. Having personal talks and getting to know each other are examples mentioned by participants. An additional important factor for motivation and performance was getting responsibility from the leader. “I was very motivated at work because I was given more responsibility and was able to be more engaged within the project” (INT 2). With more responsibility, participants felt that they are more involved in their work, and they felt pushed by their leader to show their abilities and strengths. This aligns with the preference of participants to have a trustful relationship. When the leader trusted the employees, they felt more motivated and engaged in their work and wanted to perform better. “So then I felt like the person trusted me a little bit more than he used to, or perhaps trusted me more than other people at some times, so that may be a little bit more motivated” (INT 2). However, here it must be mentioned that a balanced relationship between employee and leader was important to a few participants. Meaning that the relationship between employee and leader has boundaries and should not be too friendly and too much on a personal level. “It's a balance between like having a good and happy team and then also being able to meet the deadlines and like do what's required” (INT 7).

An additional factor that should be mentioned here is that EY has a general mentorship system, where a leader is called counselor and helps with their career and growth in the company. The counselor can be independent but also the same person as the leader of the employees’ projects. This might have been an influential factor in the social connection to the leaders as it has been mentioned by almost all participants, during or after the question about their mentorship system.
4.2.3 Soft leadership skills are important for Generation Z

Most interviewees agreed that they prefer a leader with strong soft skills and underlined that they appreciate soft attributes in a leader. “A good soft skill leader is always very important” (INT 13). One participant stated that it is a specific preference of Generation Z: “[Soft leadership skills is] definitely something I prefer I think is also more like the thing with our generation. We value those things more than the previous generation did” (INT 6). Additionally, the preference for soft skills compared to hard skills was displayed by a participant: “I would definitely prefer working with the leader that has better soft skills than hard skills” (INT 6). However, the balance between soft and hard skills is equally important and should be considered regarding soft leadership skills. As a participant states: “As a leader, you need to kind of feel what's needed as well and be able to shift the soft skills so and the hard skills” (INT 7). This balance implies that a leader with only soft skills would not be motivating and engaging and only the combination of both would be supporting. “It's a balance between all of them I would say like it's not good to have only one” (INT 7).

4.3 Supportive work environment

The third influencing factor identified by our empirical observations is a supportive work environment. This implies that Generation Z wishes to feel valued and doing valuable work, the work environment as well as that teamwork is an essential factor for the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees at work.

4.3.1 Feeling valuable and doing valuable work is motivating and engaging Generation Z

Our empirics show that Generation Z employees seek meaningful and fulfilling work, and foremost want to add value through their work, to be motivated and engaged in their careers. Our participants bring forward that they want to feel like their contributions make a difference and that they are valued members of the team and the organization. Therefore, it is important for Generation Z employees to get tasks and work that has a positive impact on society. “For me personally for motivation and engagement I would say everything comes down to how valuable do I feel my time at work” (INT 13). Another participant highlighted the importance of doing valuable work: “It makes it also feel like kind of important, […] like, I'm doing something good for society” (INT 11). It becomes evident from our data that all participants agree on the importance of adding value through their work, either to the organization or to society. “That you are valuable to the team and that you are contributing to the final results”
(INT 10). Company documents underline these findings: “Their [Generation Z employees’] motivation is derived from their desire to effect positive change in the world in which they live, instead of simply relying on others to do so” (archival material, company document, 2020). Leaders that understand and succeed in recognizing and expressing the value of their employees and the work they provide, can drive Generation Z employees to work harder and be more motivated and engaged in the tasks. This is underlined by many participants, for example: “I would say when you feel engaged the most when you really feel like your work has an impact on the goal” (INT 13).

4.3.2 Work environment is important to Generation Z

One essential part of motivation and engagement for Generation Z employees is the overall work environment and the people they are working with. “For me, the most important part is not just work, but the person, like the people that you work with” (INT 6). Through a supportive and open work environment, the participants state to be more motivated and engaged to deliver high performance and support each other. “I love being at the office and work because here I meet my colleagues […] I have fun at work, so I don't mind working one hour extra if it’s needed someday” (INT 2). The leader has an important role in the work environment and the promotion of an open- and friendly work environment is essential. This means, that the participants would like their leader to be available for questions or concerns and to make sure that the employees work with each other in a friendly manner. This is underlined by the statement from a participant: “So leaders that promote this type of open environment is very important”. This also involves an inclusive work environment where all employees feel included and heard by their leader and their colleagues. As stated by a participant: “Like that he [the leader] promotes, being inclusive with fellow colleagues” and EY’s company document “EY leaders are focused on ensuring that opportunities are equitable, differences are valued, people feel supported, and all voices are heard” (archival material, company document, 2022). Additionally, our findings show that a nonhierarchical work environment is beneficial for the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees. For example, having a flat relationship with seniors and the possibility to ask questions to anyone regarding their title. “So, I think that's something we value that there are not these untouchable people in the firm” (INT 4).

4.3.3 Teamwork is important to motivate and engage Generation Z

A significant factor that motivates and engages Generation Z employees is good teamwork. It becomes evident from our data that they value collaborations between them and their team, as
well as with their supervisor. In our study, Generation Z employees tend to feel more invested in their work and therefore more motivated and engaged, when they are working on a task together with their colleagues. It is therefore of significant importance that their leaders provide a highly collaborative environment and promote teamwork. The finding that Generation Z employees are more motivated when their leader promotes strong teamwork becomes clear in the following statement: “I like to perform in teams and do it together. You can share the happiness when [you are] doing something good, that motivates me the most” (INT 7). Another participant stated: “I think the leaders are supposed to promote a good teamwork environment and [...] support us to really work closely together” (INT 2). In addition, our findings show that good teamwork is important for the employees to feel engaged. Several participants in the interviews expressed that they feel engaged in their work because of the team, and that if they would not have a good team that they would not have liked their work as much as they do now. This shows that Generation Z puts strong value on working together with their colleagues. One interviewee expressed: “It's the team what counts” (INT 9) when we asked them what makes them engaged at work. Another interviewee underlines this: “If the team is a good team, I feel more engaged” (INT 1). An EY company document displays the statement: “I believe: ‘If we win, I win’ and sell ‘the whole of the firm’” (archival material, company document, 2023) which underlines the importance of the feeling of working in a team.
5. Analysis

In this chapter, we analyze and integrate our empirical findings on how soft leadership skills influence the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees within the company EY and existing research. Based on this analysis we have developed a model for the influence of soft leadership skills on the motivation and engagement of Generation Z as employees to present the novelty of this study.

As Generation Z is entering the workforce, the importance of acknowledging their values, beliefs, and characteristics is important to understand their motivation and engagement. With approximately 74 million people in this group of age, this generation will increase from year to year in the workforce and it is more than ever important for organizations and leaders to understand the work ethics and characteristics of this cohort (Gabriëlova & Buchko, 2021). As it becomes evident from existing literature, other generations have different preferences and expectations of leadership and how to be led (Gabriëlova & Buchko, 2021; Seemiller & Grace, 2019). Looking at what is known about Generation Z and their leadership preferences, most studies have focused on leadership in general and do not investigate the specific areas of soft leadership skills (Riggio & Tan, 2014). Through our interviews and research, we found that Generation Z employees have a strong preference for soft leadership skills in their leader, where communication, a good relationship with their leader, and a supportive work environment are the most valued factors influencing their motivation and engagement at work.

5.1 Preferences in soft leadership skills of Generation Z employees

Our empirical findings demonstrate that most of our Generation Z participants prefer a leader with strong soft skills over hard skills. As stated by one participant: “I would definitely prefer working with the leader that has better soft skills than hard skills” (INT 3). One of the interviewees expressed that the preference for soft leadership skills is a characteristic of their generation specifically, stating: “We value those things [soft leadership skills] more than the previous generation did” (INT 6). This aligns with existing literature. Scholars argue that Generation Z prefers a different style of leadership than previous generations do (Dobrowolski et al., 2022; Gabriëlova & Buchko, 2021; Grow & Yang, 2018). As soft leadership skills have become more important in leadership research in the past year, but the influence on the newest generational cohort is under-researched, we have studied the relationship between soft leadership skills and the motivation and engagement of Generation Z as employees. Existing
literature portrays that the soft side of leading is important for Generation Z in a work environment (Grow & Yang, 2018). Adding to our findings it can be stated that soft leadership skills are an important factor for Generation Z to perform well at their work. Looking specifically into the influence of these soft skills on Generation Z employees’ motivation and engagement, literature discusses the most important soft skills communication, relationship and teamwork, applied in our theoretical lens. Out of our empirical findings, we on the other hand identify communication, relationship, and a supportive work environment as most important soft skill areas. These will subsequently be discussed.

5.2 Soft leadership skills influencing Generation Z employees’ motivation and engagement

5.2.1 Communication

We find that to be motivated and engaged at work, the Generation Z participants express that good communication is key. Our findings show that clear communication from their leaders and an open communicational environment where they are always able to talk to their leader is crucial to be motivated at work. It can even be stated that Generation Z employees in our study express good communication with their leader to be the most influential factor for them to feel motivated and engaged at work. “I would also say communication is [...] the most important in my opinion” (INT 13). Existing literature argues that Generation Z, due to the digital era, is used to less face-to-face communication (Lanier, 2017). Our participants, however, find themselves more motivated when they can talk with their leader and team members personally. It is a strong engaging factor if the employees can communicate informally with their leaders and colleagues, outside of official meeting settings. As one of the participants expressed: “Definitely more communication and making sure that we [...] speak, not only within the team but one to one as well” (INT 6). Another participant underlines the importance as follows: “It was really motivating to see the other people and to talk to them, to have let's say small interactions. Because online you can't always have those interactions” (INT 4). Therefore, when a leader has good communicational skills and promotes face-to-face, friendly, and informal communication, this is positively influencing the motivation and engagement of Generation Z as employees. As one participant underlines: “Communication is key” (INT 8).

Another interesting aspect that we uncovered is the need for Generation Z employees to receive feedback from their leader. Receiving positive and constructive feedback from their leader is important for Generation Z employees to be motivated and engaged: “Feedback is always
appreciated” (INT 3). Existing literature underlines this by arguing that Generation Z is especially in need of a coaching relationship, and receiving feedback from their leader (Aziz et al., 2021). Holzer et al. (2022); Mahmoud et al. (2021) express that an example of an extrinsically motivating factor for Generation Z is verbal positive feedback as praises and recognition from their leaders. This feedback and continues conversations about their performance are needed for Generation Z employees to be motivated and engaged. Especially the regular provision of positive and constructive feedback is supportive.

5.2.2 Relationship

The relationship between leader and employee is very important for Generation Z employees to be motivated and engaged, as it is supported by our findings as well as existing literature. The main factor of motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees, in this study regarding the relationship, is having a good social connection with their leader. This involves having a personal relationship where the connection is dealt with in an open, caring, and honest manner. Especially here the leader needs to promote open conversations, where not only work-related questions can be asked but also room for personal connections is created. Through getting to know each other a friendly and respectful relationship was developed. This can be underlined by the importance of a carrying leader that is interested in the employee. This additionally supports a trustful relationship and honest questions can be asked. For many participants, getting responsibility through a trustful relationship was an essential factor to feel engaged and motivated. For example, a participant stated: “I was very motivated at work because I was given more responsibility and was able to be more engaged within the project” (INT 2). The literature aligns with the statements made by almost all participants throughout the interviews regarding relationship. Scholars agree and state that to perform well and to feel engaged Generation Z needs to have a personal relationship and social connection to their leader (Aziz et al., 2021; Grow & Yang, 2018). This implies that a leader is empathic, understanding, friendly, and caring. An additional important characteristic of the leader is to support, trust and respect their employees (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). However here it needs to be mentioned that participants mentioned that there needs to be a balance in the relationship between leader and Generation Z employee. This balance implies that only a friendly relationship with the leader is not enough, but that there need to be boundaries to be able to do what is required and to take the leader seriously. Here it was important for participants that the leader had knowledge of the projects and that deadlines were mentioned and met. In
conclusion, it can be stated that a friendly, trustful, and open relationship with a caring leader is motivating and engaging for Generation Z employees.

5.2.3 Supportive work environment

Where existing studies on Generation Z show that a supportive work environment is a motivating and engaging factor at work (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021; Mahmoud et al., 2021), we find that this factor is often discussed too general, and we have identified three important influences within this factor: to feel valued at work, teamwork, and work environment. It becomes evident from our research that Generation Z employees are most motivated and engaged when they feel like they do valuable work. Our participants express that they want to feel valuable to the team and the company and that their leader plays a pivotal role in supporting this. They argue that their leaders can make them feel valued by explaining the purpose of the task for the organization and society. When Generation Z employees feel that they contribute to their work, they are more motivated and engaged in the task. “For me personally for motivation and engagement I would say everything comes down to how valuable do I feel my time at work” (INT 13). This finding has not come forward in reviewed literature and has not been discussed as an important soft skill that a leader can promote for their Generation Z employees to be motivated and engaged. This means that this finding is exclusively found through our empirical data and not in the reviewed literature.

The environment at work is an important factor for the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees, this involves both the leader and the team the employee is working in. Here the leader should support an inclusive work environment. Almost all participants pointed out the importance to work in a good team and to have a collaborative work environment. For example, one participant said: “I like to perform in teams and do it together. You can share the happiness when doing something good” (INT 4). This preference is underlined by literature (Aziz et al., 2021; Grow & Yang, 2018). For example, Grow and Yang (2018) stated that a supportive work environment includes a close knitted work surrounding including respect and loyalty. This aligns with the importance of a respectful relationship with the leader. In addition, working with a good team was motivating and engaging for the participants because they could share their achievements, get inspired, and develop the feeling that they rely on their team members. Especially during stressful times, the importance of teamwork increased. These statements and preferences of participants are contrary to the literature. According to the literature, Generation Z perceives teamwork as rather competitive.
than collaborative (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Arar and Öneren (2018) even state that Generation Z suffers from being a team member, especially when the teamwork is inefficient. The contrast between the literature and our findings is an important factor to take into account regarding the influence of soft leadership skills on the motivation and engagement of Generation Z.

It can be stated that teamwork and that the leader supports an inclusive work environment are important factors to be motivated and engaged for Generation Z employees. However, here it must be noted that a few participants mentioned that they believe that teamwork is not related to the leader. But since the promotion of a supportive and inclusive work environment is a leadership skill, we find that the leader is an influential factor in teamwork.

5.3 The influence of soft leadership skills on motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees

Our developed model displays how soft leadership skills influence the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees in our case study conducted at the company EY. Through this model, pictured in Figure 3, an understanding of which specific soft leadership skills are influential for and how the use of them influences the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees. The model is built upon three key points: the leader on the left side, the Generation Z employee on the right side, and the influencing factors on the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees in between them.

To start, the leader is portrayed on the left side and represents the leader of the Generation Z employee. It becomes clear from our analysis that it is important for Generation Z employees that their leaders owe and apply strong soft leadership skills for them to be motivated and engaged at work (Grow & Yang, 2018; Seemiller & Grace, 2019). Subsequently, the three boxes in the middle of the model represent the three most influential factors of soft skills identified in our study that are unique for Generation Z to be motivated and engaged. To get a comprehensive understanding of these factors of soft leadership skills and why these are important specifically for Generation Z, the factors are discussed subsequently.

Our study shows that open face-to-face communication and the regular provision of positive and constructive feedback are positively influencing the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees. Almost all interview participants in this study and existing literature argue that good and clear communication is important for Generation Z. Especially in person
and frequent informal communication is unique for the motivation of Generation Z employees. Thereby, Generation Z employees in our study feel motivated and engaged in their tasks when they receive positive and constructive feedback from their leader. Secondly, it is essential for Generation Z employees in our study that their leader promotes a supportive work environment. Important soft skills within this factor are identified as promoting teamwork and an inclusive workplace. Another finding that becomes apparent to be unique for Generation Z is that to be motivated and engaged at work, they wish to feel valued and perform purposeful tasks. From Generation Z employees’ perspective, it is important that their leader provides them with valuable tasks and explains their contribution to the bigger whole. The final influential factor is the relationship between the leader and the Generation Z employee. From the perspective of Generation Z employees in this study, having a personal relationship with their leader with a caring social connection has a significant impact on their motivation and engagement. In addition, Generation Z employees express to be most motivated and engaged when they feel like their leader trusts them and gives them responsibility with challenging or impactful tasks.

As portrayed in the model, our empirical findings show that the factors influence each other in various ways. It becomes clear that communication highly influences the other two factors supportive work environment and relationship. This is found through that participants argue that communication is important for good leadership. Another statement by a participant underlines this: “Communication is the most important one because it includes also the other two [factors]. I mean, teambuilding and also relationships are based on communication” (INT 1). It is found that the factors supportive work environment and a good relationship are influencing one another moderately. Interview participants explain this as that they believe that when they have a good relationship with their leader, it is easier for their leader to create a supportive work environment. The participants discuss that all soft skills are intertwined and that a good balance between these is simple since they influence each other. One interviewee underlines this as follows: “As a leader you should be able to feel what is needed and be able to shift between the soft skills and that should be easy because they affect each other” (INT 7).

It becomes evident from our study that when a leader owes and applies strong soft leadership skills this has a positive contribution to the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees. This is portrayed on the right side of the model. Here, especially open face-to-face communication, promoting a supportive work environment based on teamwork and inclusivity, and a personal relationship where the leader and Generation Z employee share a caring and
trustful social connection are important influential soft skills. The combination of these three factors, which especially the need for this study’s participants to feel valued and perform valuable tasks, is found unique from Generation Z employees’ perspective.
Figure 3. Model for the Influence of Soft Leadership Skills on the Motivation and Engagement of Generation Z Employees

Model for the Influence of Soft Leadership Skills on the Motivation and Engagement of Generation Z Employees

- **Leader**
  - Leader owes and applies strong leadership soft skills
  - Factors highly influence one another

- **Communication**
  - Open face-to-face communication and the provision of positive and constructive feedback on a regular basis
  - Factors highly influence one another

- **Supportive work environment**
  - The leader promotes a supportive work environment based on teamwork, inclusivity and purposeful, valuable tasks
  - Factors moderately influence one another

- **Relationship**
  - A personal relationship where the social connection is caring, and the leader trusts the employee with responsibility
  - Factors highly influence one another

- **Generation Z employee**
  - Positive contribution to motivation and engagement
6. Conclusion

In this chapter, the research question is answered and elaborated on. Additionally, we discuss how the findings impact theory and practice. Furthermore, limitations will be outlined to enhance the transparency of this study, and suggestions for future research are made within the context of the influence of soft leadership skills on the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees.

6.1 Answer to research question

The purpose of this research was to explore the influence of soft leadership skills on the motivation and engagement of Generation Z as employees. The research question is:

*How do soft leadership skills influence the motivation and engagement of Generation Z as employees?*

Throughout the process of this research, an understanding of the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees and the influence of soft leadership skills is developed. In general, understanding the newest workforce and acknowledging the challenges and opportunities that new cohorts bring with them is of paramount importance for organizations today (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Especially since the literature argues that Generation Z has a different understanding of leadership, work values, motivation, work style preference, and perception of a good leader than previous generations (Arsenault, 2004; Bucovetchi et al., 2019; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Additionally, Barhate and Dirani (2022) state that it is important for human resource development to concentrate on understanding what motivates the youngest generation in the workforce and how to adapt the workplace to engage Generation Z (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). The outcomes of our study contribute to the identified gap in this research, by investigating how Generation Z employees perceive the influential factor of soft leadership skills on their motivation and engagement. Our study identifies three factors as the most influential to increase motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees. These three factors are: communication, a supportive work environment, and the relationship between employee and leader. These factors can be categorized as soft leadership skills. These three factors additionally answered the question of ‘how’ soft leadership skills influence, because it becomes evident in our findings that soft leadership skills positively influenced motivation and engagement, and we can state that it increases Generation Z’s motivation and engagement at
work. This is underlined by the statements made by almost all participants that they wish to have a leader with strong soft skills, and they prefer a leader that owes soft skills over hard skills. Additionally, it can be stated that if there is a lack of soft leadership skills, a decrease in motivation and engagement is visible. Especially here the soft leadership skill communication is an essential part of either an increase, when open and face-to-face communication was given, or decrease, when there was a lack of communication, in motivation and engagement. Additionally, Generation Z employees appreciate, according to our study, when the leader promotes a personal relationship that supports and develops trust by giving responsibility to employees. Novelty in our study is that there is a positive influence on motivation and engagement when Generation Z employees felt that their work was valuable and valued. This is according to our study an essential soft leadership skill that needs to be involved by leaders to motivate Generation Z employees. Concluding, we can state that soft leadership skills positively influence and increase the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees.

6.2 Theoretical implications

As our study concerns the influence of leadership soft skills on the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees, our study contributes with general implications to both Generation Z- and leadership theory. Prior studies on Generation Z focused on the comparison to the previous generations and the entrance of Generation Z into the work field. Especially since there are approximately 74 million people in this group of age, they are becoming a strong and large group in the work environment (Gabrielo & Buchko, 2021). Due to this, research about Generation Z is a highly important topic (Aggarwal et al., 2020; Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Gabrielo & Buchko, 2021; Hurrelmann & Albrecht, 2021; Niezurawska et al., 2023; Seemiller & Grace, 2019). Our study contributes to this literature by adding new knowledge regarding the perspective of Generation Z employees on motivation and engagement at work. We focus on the perspective of Generation Z specifically, since prior studies, for example, the study of Twenge et al. (2010), have focused on the comparison of Generations X and Y. With our study, we contribute in-depth information and description of the new cohort’s perception of motivation and engagement to generational theory, by having investigated this cohort’s perception. We found that Generation Z employees specifically place high importance on the soft side of leadership and appreciate a leader that implements these soft skills in their leadership style. This is in line with a study by Grow and Yang (2018), where they discuss that Generation Z expects their leader to have soft skills within their leadership skill portfolio. In
addition to that, we answer the call of Barhate and Dirani (2022) for further research on how organizations can motivate and engage Generation Z by studying the influence of soft leadership skills on the motivation and engagement of Generation Z as employees.

Additionally, we add new knowledge to leadership theory by having studied and analyzed the influence of soft leadership skills on Generation Z employees. It is underlined in the existing literature that Generation Z has a different understanding of leadership and work values than previous generations (Bucovetchi et al., 2019; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Therefore, the topic of how to guide and lead this new cohort is an important topic and our study contributes to this understanding. Our findings present that soft leadership skills have a positive influence on the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees, where three main factors of the soft side of leading become most evident: communication, relationships, and a supportive work environment. Our study specifically adds novel insights to existing theory, where we find that Generation Z employees especially wish to feel valuable at work and perform valuable tasks. This is something that was not found in previous literature and therefore is unique to our study. Our findings on the influence of soft leadership skills are portrayed in our own developed model: ‘Model for the Influence of Soft Leadership Skills on the Motivation and Engagement of Generation Z Employees’. This model is displayed in Figure 3.

6.3 Practical implications

Our study supports the development of processes as how to lead, motivate and engage Generation Z employees, through understanding the most important soft skills of leaders and in what way they could be adapted and used. As mentioned before, Generation Z is the new upcoming generation in the work environment and will be one of the largest and strongest cohorts in the workforce in the upcoming years. Understanding how to lead, guide and motivate as well as engage Generation Z employees and inspire them to achieve their best possible work performance, is therefore of significant importance. Our study contributed to creating a greater understanding of how to adapt their systems and processes to the next generational cohort.

Additionally, our study does not only contribute to creating a better understanding of Generation Z for companies but also for leaders specifically. This is especially important since most leaders today belong to a different generation than their employees’ generations, and therefore have different values and working styles (Bucovetchi et al., 2019; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Through our focus on specific soft leadership skills, information and
implementations for leaders can be taken out of our study on how to motivate and engage Generation Z employees. For example, theory can be derived from our research to develop training programs for leaders. These training programs could be split into three sections: communication, relationship, and a supportive work environment. Within these trainings specific questions can be asked to these sections and the leaders can evaluate if they use these skills while leading. If they do not use these skills yet, our analysis and findings can help to understand how to apply and improve these skills to increase the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees.

Another practical implication of our research is that Generation Z employees can get a better understanding and acknowledge important factors influencing their motivation and engagement. Our study contributes to this, through our developed model that provides an overview of soft leadership skill factors preferred by Generation Z employees and our analysis and findings support through detailed elaboration on these skills. Through this understanding, it will be easier for employees to communicate their needs and wishes to their leaders and to underline them. Due to this, misunderstandings can be prevented, and differences can be discussed and solved.

6.4 Limitations

It is known that qualitative research can portray a unique insight into the experiences and perspectives of the participants. Our study focuses on Generation Z employees within one organization and therefore provides an in-depth investigation of their perspective on the influence of soft leadership skills on their motivation and engagement. The downside, however, can be projected as the limited size of the sample unit used in our study. Since our sample unit is relatively small, consisting of 13 interviewees, this can limit the generalizability of our findings to the one cohort Generation Z.

Another identified limitation regards our application of a purposive sampling method to acquire relevant interview participants. Throughout the study and sampling process, we considered our single case as a whole, regardless of the country of working in, the field of work, or the department within EY, to get the broadest view possible. This can arise difficulties because the differences in perception influenced by cultural differences and different work areas have not been considered. Nevertheless, by consulting our own LinkedIn networks and reaching out to potential participants, all our participants turned out to work within the same four European
countries and all participants have a European nationality. This is a similarity that can support the generalizability of perspectives. However, cultural differences do exist between these four countries and can influence the perspective. Additionally, since we only interviewed EY employees with the same or similar leadership structure, different leadership structures were not considered. This leads to that our sample group can be described as too narrow and can be seen as a limitation of our study.

Another limitation of this research can be connected to subjectivity since qualitative research methods rely on the interpretation of the data by the researcher. With this given and with the fact that both of us researchers are Generation Z ourselves, there is a chance that the findings may be influenced by our own biases, beliefs, and values. During the data collection and analysis, we have been aware of our own subjectivity and therefore the data analysis was done by cross-checking each other’s coding and analysis to minimize the risk of bias analysis.

### 6.5 Future research

Due to the importance of our research topic and the increasing representation of Generation Z in the workforce, we suggest conducting further research in this field. In this study, we focused on the perspective of Generation Z employees and how they are motivated and engaged through soft leadership skills. However, here further research could be conducted by taking the perspective of leaders guiding Generation Z. Through this future research, an understanding can be developed of how the perspective of Generation Z aligns or does not align with the perception of the leaders and how it influences their motivation and engagement. Here it should be considered that the leaders themselves represent a generation and if this future research is conducted it would be beneficial if all leader-participants are from the same generation to have a direct comparison to Generation Z.

Novel for our study specifically, is that Generation Z would like to feel valued or would like to receive valuable tasks from their leader to be motivated and engaged at work. This finding invites new future research within the field of a supportive work environment, to conduct studies concerning the meaningfulness of tasks for Generation Z and how leaders can influence the feeling of being valued and making tasks valuable. Since it has not been mentioned in the literature regarding soft leadership skills and Generation Z employees’ motivation and engagement, we see a possibility to further investigate this phenomenon.
Additionally, future research can be conducted using a quantitative research method instead of a qualitative study. Since we focused on Generation Z employees within one organization in this study, and therefore elaborated on an in-depth investigation of their perspective, a qualitative approach was found to be most suitable. However, to achieve a higher level of generalization the research could be conducted through a quantitative method. For example, through a survey where this study’s questions are asked on a scale from 1-5 (not important to very important) to elaborate on the importance of specific skills on motivation and engagement in a broader manner. With this method, data can be collected to generalize specifically to one generation.

In further research, more components regarding the research participants could be considered for example gender or cultural differences and different leadership structures. We have not taken gender and cultural differences into account, even though our participants came from different cultural backgrounds and were associated with different genders. However, if future studies lay their focus on gender and cultural differences, it might appear that these play an important role in the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees. Additionally, cases where the leadership structures are different and not as in our case similar or the same can be taken into consideration. As we stated above it was in our case beneficial to have a holistic case study to see a pattern from the perspective of our research participants. However, further studies can be made as multiple case studies where different leadership structures, genders, or cultures are represented to display a wider scope of the research. Here it is important to have a larger sample unit to be able to evaluate different perspectives.

6.6 Concluding remarks

This study supports previous research by acknowledging the perspective of the newest generation at work and provides a greater understanding of the influence of soft leadership skills on Generation Z’s motivation and engagement. This study contributes both to Generation Z theory as well as leadership theory, specifically on soft leadership skills. Additionally, the findings of this study strive to have a significant impact on companies and leaders and contribute to the understanding of soft leadership skills from a Generation Z perspective. Through the empirical findings, we identified three main factors influencing the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees. These are communication, relationship, and a supportive work environment. Through our analysis, we were able to answer our research question and present the novelty of this study, presented in our developed model: ‘Model of
the Influence of Soft Leadership Skills on the Motivation and Engagement of Generation Z Employees’ (Figure 3). It becomes evident from our study that it has a positive contribution to the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees when a leader owes and applies strong soft leadership skills. Our study shows that open face-to-face communication and the regular provision of positive and constructive feedback are positively influencing the motivation and engagement of Generation Z employees. Secondly, it is essential for Generation Z employees in our study that their leader promotes a supportive work environment based on teamwork, inclusivity, and purposeful, valuable tasks. These valuable tasks specifically are a novel finding of our study, where we found that Generation Z employees wish to feel valuable and perform valuable tasks at work. The final influential factor is the relationship between the leader and the Generation Z employee, where the social connection is caring, and the leader trusts the employee with responsibility. In conclusion, we find that soft leadership skills, specifically the factors of communication, relationship, and a supportive work environment, positively influence Generation Z employees’ motivation and engagement.
7. Reference list


EY. (2016). Next-gen workforce: secret weapon or biggest challenge.


Appendix A Interview Questions

Interview Thesis Research Tamara Spies & Emma Riksen

General information

- Introduction about us and the research purpose
  *Generation Z’s perspective on the effect of soft leadership skills on motivation and engagement at work.*
- Introduction of the participant (ask about their birthyear to check gen Z, where they are working from)
- Information about GDPR and approval of recording, transcription and after deletion of recording. Consent form.

1. Role within the company and structure of team
   a. How would you describe your role within the company and the structure of (your) team?
   b. How would you describe your relationship with your current boss? (Hands-on, close communication, or very distant, hierarchy?)

2. Soft leadership skills
   *Provide a definition of soft leadership skills and the difference between soft- and hard skills.*
   a. Can you share an example of a leader who you believe has particularly strong soft skills? What specific behaviors or actions do they exhibit?
   b. In your experience, how do you and other Generation Z employees respond to a leader with strong soft leadership skills, and how does this impact your work performance?
   c. Can you describe how your current leader, if so, applies soft leadership skills to you and your team?

*Provide the definition (and difference) of how we understand motivation and engagement within this research.*

3. Motivation at work
   a. Motivation
      i. Can you think of a time when you felt particularly motivated at work? In what way did your leader contribute to these feelings?
   b. The effect of soft leadership skills on motivation
      i. Can you share a personal experience where a leader with strong soft skills, was able to motivate you and your team?
ii. Can you provide an example of where a leader’s lack of soft leadership skills had a negative impact on your motivation, and what could have been done differently?

iii. In terms of communication, teamwork, and relationships. How would you reflect on these three soft leadership skills regarding your motivation?

4. Engagement at work
   a. Engagement
      i. Can you think of a time when you felt particularly engaged at work? In what way did your leader contributed to these feelings?
   b. The effect of soft leadership skills on engagement
      i. Can you share a personal experience where a leader with strong soft skills was able to engage you and your team?
      ii. Can you provide an example of where a leader’s lack of soft leadership skills had a negative impact on your engagement, and what could have been done differently?
      iii. In terms of communication, teamwork, and relationships. How would you reflect on these three soft leadership skills regarding your engagement at work?

5. Round-off questions
   a. In your opinion, what specific soft leadership skills are most effective in motivating and engaging employees, and why? (Not regarding communication, teamwork, and relationships).
   b. Is there anything else that comes into your mind right now that is relevant to our research? Not regarding soft skills.

6. Closure
   a. If they have material that can be used for the thesis, e.g., PowerPoint presentations, guidelines, other documents that regard Generation Z and leadership.
   b. If they have colleagues that would be interested in participating in an interview.

Thank you for your participation.
Appendix B Interview Guideline

General information
- Introduction about us and the research purpose
- Introduction of the participant
- Information about GDPR and approval of recording, transcription and after deletion of recording. Consent form.

1. Your role within the company and the structure of your team

2. Soft leadership skills
   *We will provide a definition of soft leadership skills and some examples.*
   a. Experiences of soft leadership skills.
   b. Experiences of leaders with soft leadership skills.

3. Motivation at work
   a. Motivation
   b. The effect of soft leadership skills on motivation

4. Engagement at work
   a. Engagement
   b. The effect of soft leadership skills on engagement

5. Closure
   a. Do you have material that can be used for the thesis, e.g. PowerPoint presentations, guidelines, other documents that regard Generation Z and leadership?
   b. Do you have colleagues that would be interested in participating in an interview?

Thank you so much for your participation.
If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to us via e-mail or LinkedIn.

Tamara Spies, spta21gb@student.ju.se
Emma Riksen, riem21ji@student.ju.se
Appendix C Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

What is the purpose of the collected personal data within this study?
This research is conducted for the thesis within the master Global Management at Jönköping International Business School. The duration of the research is six months, from January to June. The goal of the research is to create a better and deeper understanding of the entrepreneurial motivation of Generation Z towards entrepreneurship and the establishments of start-ups.

Data Protection Privacy Note
Taking part in this research is completely voluntarily. Therefore, when you choose to be a participant within this research, you will be asked to sign this form of consent. Furthermore, all the information we conduct during the research is strictly confidential and will only be used for the purpose of this study. You will remain anonymous, which means your names will not be visible in the published articles.

Data Storage
The collected data will be stored within a secured file, whereas only the researchers are able to access the document. When the thesis is completed, the data will be deleted permanently immediately.

Under the GDPR you have the following rights:

- The right to be informed. You have the right to be informed when and where your personal data is being used.
- The right of access. You have the right to ask for a copy of the gathered data. You can do this by making a ‘subject access request’.
- The right of rectification. You have the right to ask for your data held to be corrected.
- The right to erasure. You have the right to ask for your data to be deleted.
- The right to restrict processing. You have the right to limit the way an organization uses your personal data if you are concerned about the accuracy of the data or how it is being used.
- The right to data portability. You have the right to get your personal data from an organization in a way that is accessible and machine-readable. You also have the right to ask an organization to transfer your data to another organization.
- The right to object. You have the right to object to the use of your personal data in some circumstances. You have an absolute right to object to an organization using your data for direct marketing.
- The right against automated decision-making and profiling. You have the right not to be subject to a decision that is based on automated processing if the decision affects your legal rights or other equally important matters; to understand the reasons behind decisions made about you by automated processing and the possible consequences of the decisions, and to object to profiling in certain situations, including for direct marketing purposes.

Moreover, in the unfortunate case you are unhappy with your participation within the study you are free to contact the data protection officer at dpo@ju.se. In case you have any doubts or questions, do not hesitate to contact us with the following contact details.

Researchers:
Emma Riksen
riem21ji@student.ju.se

Tamara Spies
spta21gb@student.ju.se

Participant:
____________________
____________________
____________________