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## **An Exploratory Study of Leadership Preferences of Millennials**

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### **Abstract**

**Objectives:** This paper is aimed at familiarizing the reader with generational cohorts that have been studied so far. This shall help develop an understanding of the varying environments in which these generations have grown up and focus on the millennial to identify how they differ from preceding generations in general. This paper further explores the preferences of millennial towards leadership styles and traits at a given point of time.

**Methods/statistical Analysis:** The responses have been collected by means of a printed questionnaire which respondents have filled individually. The analysis phase involved extensive use of IBM SPSS and MS Excel to help draw conclusions on the data collected. One of the important statistical methods used in the study is multiple response analysis.

**Findings:** The research paper presents an interesting set of findings coupled with necessary recommendations to assist the reader in assessing the state of millennial leadership with a view towards gender based differences.

**Applications/ improvements:** The key idea is to bring out the undertones of leadership as they shall be over the coming years as this generation floods the workforce entirely. The gender dimension has been explored in parallel to uncover the differences among them. Respondents are students from a B- school preparing to enter the workforce shortly. Thus they help derive a clear picture of the mind-set of the current generation entering the workforce.

**Keywords:** Millennial, Generations, Leadership styles, Leadership theories

### **1. Introduction**

“Move fast and break things. Unless you are breaking stuff, you are not moving fast enough.”

Mark Zuckerberg

The above statement made by Zuckerberg is one of his most often quoted lines. The texture and feel of his statement is ingrained with millennial values and embodies the disruptive spirit of the millennial era that speeds into decisions, ideas and new discoveries. The statement is particularly well fitting on Zuckerberg who quit his undergraduate course at Harvard to fulfill a business idea- a website called Facemash‘ he had developed to link people that became wildly popular, initially at Harvard campus and later outside. Today Zuckerberg leads one of the most highly valued companies in the world with his own unique style, As one of the most powerful and influential millennial leaders in the world. The need for this study arises from the dearth of literature that analyses millennials particularly those who are at the cusp of entering the workforce and also studying the gender wise differences in preferences for leadership traits and leadership styles. Such a study has major implications, both theoretical and practical.

Theoretically speaking, it helps contribute to the literature on millennial studies, with the unique aspect that workforce ready candidates have been surveyed. The study also very subtly uncovers the gender based biases and attempts to identify the mind-set of the millennial generation that shall soon be the largest generation cohort in the workplace. Organizations, businesses and recruiters gain insights into the behavioural dynamics of the next generation workforce. It helps them define, adapt and create new organizational policies and strategies to better manage this generation in their workplace and derive the best productivity from them while maintaining a high degree of employee satisfaction and retention. The study also helps organizations to understand the drift of organizational culture towards a different system of values and beliefs and thus helps them create the necessary environment to allow them to grow and flourish. Maladjustment in values may lead to dissatisfaction and cause misfits with the organization in general. Above all the study shows the mode of leadership that millennials may most likely follow and the kind of leaders they may make. Clearly, this is an input to develop leadership training programs that address their unique needs and abilities.

### **1.1 Generational cohorts and millennial**

Very broadly, a generation may be defined as —the entire body of individuals born and living at about the same time or —the term of years, roughly 30 among human beings accepted as the average period between birth of parents and the of their offspring (Dictionary.com) The term is also known as biogenesis, reproduction or procreation in the biological sciences. (Wikipedia, 2018) However, the treatment of the word generation ‘varies significantly from the biological sciences when used in the field of social sciences. Here, it is used synonymously with the term cohort’.

The seminal work in this field is credited to Karl Mannheim, who in his widely cited 1923 essay titled —The Problem of Generational produced the most systematic and well developed treatment of generations. Mannheim said that socio-historical environment of their youth significantly influences people, thus creating shared experiences that lead to social cohorts, which in turn influence the future events that take place.

### **1.2 Leadership styles**

The following description of the various styles of leadership draws from Daniel Goleman’s seminal work —Leadership that gets results in a HBR series that identifies, describes and provides an insight into the six distinct leadership styles and how to see them effectively. (Goleman, 2011)

The research found six distinct leadership styles, each having different proportion of emotional intelligence. And perhaps most important, the research shows that for the best results of leadership, one needs to follow more than two styles of leadership.

Following six leadership styles are being used by the executives these days. The styles are: Coercive, Authoritative, Affiliative, Democratic, Pacesetter and Coaching.

## **3. Objective of the study**

This paper studies the preferences of millennials towards leadership styles and traits at a given point of time. The key idea is to bring out the undertones of leadership as they shall be over the coming years as this generation floods the workforce entirely.

This study seeks to achieve the following key objectives:

1. To identify the styles of leadership preferred by millennials

2. To identify the top leadership traits that matter the most to millennials.
3. To study gender based differences in opinion about preferred leadership style

#### **4. Research Methodology**

The main objective of this project was to study the leadership styles and traits that millennials prefer by utilizing a survey of their opinions at 4 top B-Schools situated in Tri-City ( Punjab) . An understanding of millennial traits and leadership behavior is crucial to understanding the next generation of leadership and the evolution of the modern workforce. Such understanding has a key role play in designing future strategy for organizational growth.

##### **4.1 Research Tool**

A questionnaire has been designed specifically to query MBA candidates over their opinions on leadership traits, leadership styles and gender wise opinions on leadership. Only closed ended questions have been utilized to capture their opinion. This questionnaire derives from several components of understanding, experience and existing literature on the subject of gender studies of millennials and leadership studies. A non-coercive, participative and voluntary approach has been employed to obtain this data

##### **4.2 Sampling Method**

A combination of two sampling methods has been employed to obtain the best possible representation of the population. Stratification has been used to cut across genders (Male and Female). At the second level, convenience has been used to gather responses across the student body comprised of millennials.

##### **4.3 Sample Size**

The total sample size for this study is 140, divided across both gender groups.

##### **4.4 Analytical Tool**

IBM'S SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), version 23 has been employed as the analytical tool in this study. The functions allowing multiple response analysis and graphical analysis of the data gathered have been especially useful in analysis in this project.

#### **5. Analysis**

140 responses have been gathered from millennials it helps to see the average age so as to build an estimate of the time period by which these respondents will enter the work force. Basic descriptive statistics show mean age at  $\mu_{total}=21.94$  years rounded off to 22 years. A gender-wise analysis reveals that out of 140 candidates, 84 are women at mean age of  $\mu_f=21.96$  years with standard deviation  $\sigma_f=0.987$ . The remaining 56 candidates are males with  $\mu_m = 21.89$  and  $\sigma_m=1.557$ .

A large 72.9% of respondents believe that they are leaders in their current peer group or social circle. This is a healthy statistic, Woofing 96.4% candidates replying in the positive about their leadership aspirations. The three candidates replying negatively to this may have to be investigated through personal questions to ascertain the nature of their response and to identify their reasons for such a response.

The investigation of this variable shows that while very few women think that women make better leaders than men, a relatively larger percentage of male respondents are inclined to think

that men make better leaders than women. What is noticeable from the data is that while 3.6% of women have answered in favour of male leaders being better than women, none of the male candidates are of the opinion that women make better leaders than men. Also, while 87.9% of responses are gender neutral, i.e. they espouse the opinion that gender does not decide the quality of a leader, out of those 87.9% of responses, 51.4% belong to women and only 36.4% belong to men.

The overall analysis does indicate a level of gender bias among the male candidates. This gives area for further improvement in the society and general mind-set at large which has been a hindrance to the ascent of women to leadership positions. It also favours the theory that men would not like to work under a female leader. While the degree of such bias is much smaller than previous generations and a large 88% millennials surveyed in this report have gender neutral opinions, the fact that gender-bias has seeped down into this generation cannot be denied and has to be worked upon further to create equal opportunities for both men and women in the workforce. The findings are better illustrated by the following tables.

| var_GenOpinion * var_Gender Crosstabulation |                        |                         |            |        |        |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|------------|--------|--------|
|                                             |                        |                         | var_Gender |        | Total  |
|                                             |                        |                         | F          | M      |        |
| var_GenOpinion                              | Men are better         | Count                   | 3          | 5      | 8      |
|                                             |                        | % within var_GenOpinion | 37.5%      | 62.5%  | 100.0% |
|                                             |                        | % within var_Gender     | 3.6%       | 8.9%   | 5.7%   |
|                                             |                        | % of Total              | 2.1%       | 3.6%   | 5.7%   |
|                                             | Women are better       | Count                   | 9          | 0      | 9      |
|                                             |                        | % within var_GenOpinion | 100.0%     | 0.0%   | 100.0% |
|                                             |                        | % within var_Gender     | 10.7%      | 0.0%   | 6.4%   |
|                                             |                        | % of Total              | 6.4%       | 0.0%   | 6.4%   |
|                                             | Gender does not decide | Count                   | 72         | 51     | 123    |
|                                             |                        | % within var_GenOpinion | 58.5%      | 41.5%  | 100.0% |
|                                             |                        | % within var_Gender     | 85.7%      | 91.1%  | 87.9%  |
|                                             |                        | % of Total              | 51.4%      | 36.4%  | 87.9%  |
| Total                                       |                        | Count                   | 84         | 56     | 140    |
|                                             |                        | % within var_GenOpinion | 60.0%      | 40.0%  | 100.0% |
|                                             |                        | % within var_Gender     | 100.0%     | 100.0% | 100.0% |
|                                             |                        | % of Total              | 60.0%      | 40.0%  | 100.0% |

**Table 2: Crosstab for Gender Opinion and Gender**

The most popular leadership styles: It has been observed that the democratic style of leadership has been voted as the most popular followed by coaching and authoritative. It can be seen that while women conform to democratic, authoritative and coaching styles (in that order), males prefer democratic, coaching and authoritative styles. Most candidates have shown a tendency towards at least two styles, indicating better leadership ability.

| Style      | Total percentage | Male Responses | Female responses |
|------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Democratic | 73.6%            | 27.9%          | 45.7%            |

|               |       |       |       |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Coaching      | 66.4% | 41.4% | 25.0% |
| Authoritative | 53.6% | 21.4% | 32.1% |
| Affiliative   | 35%   | 18.6% | 16.4% |
| Pacesetting   | 17.1% | 6.4%  | 10.7% |
| Coercive      | 13.6% | 11.4% | 2.1%  |

Table 3: Most preferred leadership style Gender wise

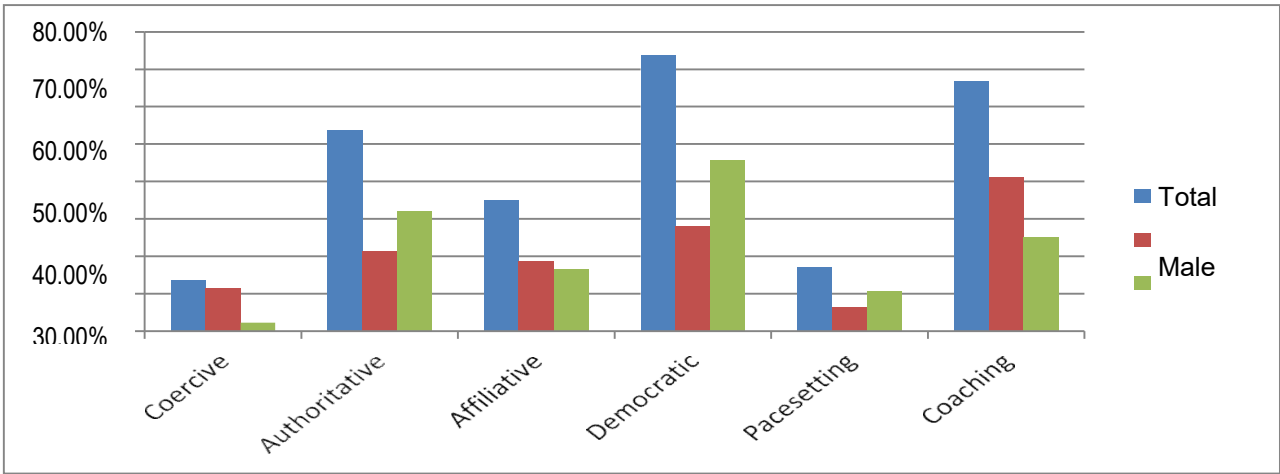


Chart 1: Findings on leadership styles

5.4.4Leadership TraitsmostpreferredbyMillennials

This is the most important analysis undertaken in this project. The technique used is multiple response analysis for a total of 25 traits out of which the objective is to identify the top 10 traits that millennials identify with.

| Leadership Traits Frequencies |                                    |           |         |                  |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------|------------------|
|                               |                                    | Responses |         | Percent of Cases |
|                               |                                    | N         | Percent |                  |
| bundle of traits <sup>a</sup> | Excellent Communicator             | 119       | 8.6%    | 85.0%            |
|                               | Optimist                           | 74        | 5.3%    | 52.9%            |
|                               | Trustworthy (has integrity)        | 77        | 5.5%    | 55.0%            |
|                               | Collaborative                      | 29        | 2.1%    | 20.7%            |
|                               | Decisive                           | 42        | 3.0%    | 30.0%            |
|                               | Fun to work with                   | 59        | 4.2%    | 42.1%            |
|                               | Knows the organization well        | 59        | 4.2%    | 42.1%            |
|                               | Empathetic                         | 31        | 2.2%    | 22.1%            |
|                               | Excellent technical knowledge      | 61        | 4.4%    | 43.6%            |
|                               | Impartial                          | 32        | 2.3%    | 22.9%            |
|                               | Flexible                           | 82        | 5.9%    | 58.6%            |
|                               | Respects team opinion              | 80        | 5.8%    | 57.1%            |
|                               | Appreciative                       | 31        | 2.2%    | 22.1%            |
|                               | Ethical                            | 51        | 3.7%    | 36.4%            |
|                               | Courageous                         | 32        | 2.3%    | 22.9%            |
|                               | Honest & Transparent               | 79        | 5.7%    | 56.4%            |
|                               | Responsive                         | 67        | 4.8%    | 47.9%            |
|                               | Innovative                         | 80        | 5.8%    | 57.1%            |
|                               | Authentic (Strongly value based)   | 19        | 1.4%    | 13.6%            |
|                               | Disruptive (Challenges status quo) | 17        | 1.2%    | 12.1%            |
|                               | Relationship-building individual   | 54        | 3.9%    | 38.6%            |
|                               | Imaginative & Creative             | 49        | 3.5%    | 35.0%            |
|                               | Goal oriented                      | 98        | 7.1%    | 70.0%            |
|                               | Driven (hungry for success)        | 27        | 1.9%    | 19.3%            |
|                               | Coaches the team                   | 41        | 2.9%    | 29.3%            |
|                               | Total                              | 1390      | 100.0%  | 992.9%           |

Table 4: Multiple responses for top 10 leadership traits

|                               |                             |                     | var_Gender |       | Total |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|------------|-------|-------|
|                               |                             |                     | F          | M     |       |
| bundle of traits <sup>a</sup> | Excellent Communicator      | Count               | 71         | 48    | 119   |
|                               |                             | % within \$Ltraits  | 59.7%      | 40.3% |       |
|                               |                             | % within var_Gender | 84.5%      | 85.7% |       |
|                               |                             | % of Total          | 50.7%      | 34.3% | 85.0% |
|                               | Optimist                    | Count               | 52         | 22    | 74    |
|                               |                             | % within \$Ltraits  | 70.3%      | 29.7% |       |
|                               |                             | % within var_Gender | 61.9%      | 39.3% |       |
|                               |                             | % of Total          | 37.1%      | 15.7% | 52.9% |
|                               | Trustworthy (has integrity) | Count               | 46         | 31    | 77    |
|                               |                             | % within \$Ltraits  | 59.7%      | 40.3% |       |
|                               |                             | % within var_Gender | 54.8%      | 55.4% |       |
|                               |                             | % of Total          | 32.9%      | 22.1% | 55.0% |
|                               | Collaborative               | Count               | 14         | 15    | 29    |
|                               |                             | % within \$Ltraits  | 48.3%      | 51.7% |       |
|                               |                             | % within var_Gender | 16.7%      | 26.8% |       |
|                               |                             | % of Total          | 10.0%      | 10.7% | 20.7% |
|                               | Decisive                    | Count               | 25         | 17    | 42    |
|                               |                             | % within \$Ltraits  | 59.5%      | 40.5% |       |
|                               |                             | % within var_Gender | 29.8%      | 30.4% |       |
|                               |                             | % of Total          | 17.9%      | 12.1% | 30.0% |
|                               | Fun to work with            | Count               | 43         | 16    | 59    |
|                               |                             | % within \$Ltraits  | 72.9%      | 27.1% |       |
|                               |                             | % within var_Gender | 51.2%      | 28.6% |       |
|                               |                             | % of Total          | 30.7%      | 11.4% | 42.1% |
|                               | Knows the organization well | Count               | 30         | 29    | 59    |
|                               |                             | % within \$Ltraits  | 50.8%      | 49.2% |       |
|                               |                             | % within var_Gender | 35.7%      | 51.8% |       |
|                               |                             | % of Total          | 21.4%      | 20.7% | 42.1% |
|                               | Empathetic                  | Count               | 14         | 17    | 31    |
|                               |                             | % within \$Ltraits  | 45.2%      | 54.8% |       |
|                               |                             | % within var_Gender | 16.7%      | 30.4% |       |
|                               |                             | % of Total          | 10.0%      | 12.1% | 22.1% |

|                               |                     |       |       |       |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Excellent technical knowledge | Count               | 26    | 35    | 61    |
|                               | % within \$Ltraits  | 42.6% | 57.4% |       |
|                               | % within var_Gender | 31.0% | 62.5% |       |
|                               | % of Total          | 18.6% | 25.0% | 43.6% |
| Impartial                     | Count               | 24    | 8     | 32    |
|                               | % within \$Ltraits  | 75.0% | 25.0% |       |
|                               | % within var_Gender | 28.6% | 14.3% |       |
|                               | % of Total          | 17.1% | 5.7%  | 22.9% |
| Flexible                      | Count               | 50    | 32    | 82    |
|                               | % within \$Ltraits  | 61.0% | 39.0% |       |
|                               | % within var_Gender | 59.5% | 57.1% |       |
|                               | % of Total          | 35.7% | 22.9% | 58.6% |
| Respects team opinion         | Count               | 52    | 28    | 80    |
|                               | % within \$Ltraits  | 65.0% | 35.0% |       |
|                               | % within var_Gender | 61.9% | 50.0% |       |
|                               | % of Total          | 37.1% | 20.0% | 57.1% |
| Appreciative                  | Count               | 18    | 13    | 31    |
|                               | % within \$Ltraits  | 58.1% | 41.9% |       |
|                               | % within var_Gender | 21.4% | 23.2% |       |
|                               | % of Total          | 12.9% | 9.3%  | 22.1% |
| Ethical                       | Count               | 28    | 23    | 51    |
|                               | % within \$Ltraits  | 54.9% | 45.1% |       |
|                               | % within var_Gender | 33.3% | 41.1% |       |
|                               | % of Total          | 20.0% | 16.4% | 36.4% |
| Courageous                    | Count               | 17    | 15    | 32    |
|                               | % within \$Ltraits  | 53.1% | 46.9% |       |
|                               | % within var_Gender | 20.2% | 26.8% |       |
|                               | % of Total          | 12.1% | 10.7% | 22.9% |
| Honest & Transparent          | Count               | 50    | 29    | 79    |
|                               | % within \$Ltraits  | 63.3% | 36.7% |       |
|                               | % within var_Gender | 59.5% | 51.8% |       |
|                               | % of Total          | 35.7% | 20.7% | 56.4% |

|                               |                     |       |       |       |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Excellent technical knowledge | Count               | 26    | 35    | 61    |
|                               | % within \$Ltraits  | 42.6% | 57.4% |       |
|                               | % within var_Gender | 31.0% | 62.5% |       |
|                               | % of Total          | 18.6% | 25.0% | 43.6% |
| Impartial                     | Count               | 24    | 8     | 32    |
|                               | % within \$Ltraits  | 75.0% | 25.0% |       |
|                               | % within var_Gender | 28.6% | 14.3% |       |
|                               | % of Total          | 17.1% | 5.7%  | 22.9% |
| Flexible                      | Count               | 50    | 32    | 82    |
|                               | % within \$Ltraits  | 61.0% | 39.0% |       |
|                               | % within var_Gender | 59.5% | 57.1% |       |
|                               | % of Total          | 35.7% | 22.9% | 58.6% |
| Respects team opinion         | Count               | 52    | 28    | 80    |
|                               | % within \$Ltraits  | 65.0% | 35.0% |       |
|                               | % within var_Gender | 61.9% | 50.0% |       |
|                               | % of Total          | 37.1% | 20.0% | 57.1% |
| Appreciative                  | Count               | 18    | 13    | 31    |
|                               | % within \$Ltraits  | 58.1% | 41.9% |       |
|                               | % within var_Gender | 21.4% | 23.2% |       |
|                               | % of Total          | 12.9% | 9.3%  | 22.1% |
| Ethical                       | Count               | 28    | 23    | 51    |
|                               | % within \$Ltraits  | 54.9% | 45.1% |       |
|                               | % within var_Gender | 33.3% | 41.1% |       |
|                               | % of Total          | 20.0% | 16.4% | 36.4% |
| Courageous                    | Count               | 17    | 15    | 32    |
|                               | % within \$Ltraits  | 53.1% | 46.9% |       |
|                               | % within var_Gender | 20.2% | 26.8% |       |
|                               | % of Total          | 12.1% | 10.7% | 22.9% |
| Honest & Transparent          | Count               | 50    | 29    | 79    |
|                               | % within \$Ltraits  | 63.3% | 36.7% |       |
|                               | % within var_Gender | 59.5% | 51.8% |       |
|                               | % of Total          | 35.7% | 20.7% | 56.4% |

|                                    |                     |       |       |        |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|-------|-------|--------|
| Responsive                         | Count               | 44    | 23    | 67     |
|                                    | % within \$Ltraits  | 65.7% | 34.3% |        |
|                                    | % within var_Gender | 52.4% | 41.1% |        |
|                                    | % of Total          | 31.4% | 16.4% | 47.9%  |
| Innovative                         | Count               | 48    | 32    | 80     |
|                                    | % within \$Ltraits  | 60.0% | 40.0% |        |
|                                    | % within var_Gender | 57.1% | 57.1% |        |
|                                    | % of Total          | 34.3% | 22.9% | 57.1%  |
| Authentic (Strongly value based)   | Count               | 16    | 3     | 19     |
|                                    | % within \$Ltraits  | 84.2% | 15.8% |        |
|                                    | % within var_Gender | 19.0% | 5.4%  |        |
|                                    | % of Total          | 11.4% | 2.1%  | 13.6%  |
| Disruptive (Challenges status quo) | Count               | 15    | 2     | 17     |
|                                    | % within \$Ltraits  | 88.2% | 11.8% |        |
|                                    | % within var_Gender | 17.9% | 3.6%  |        |
|                                    | % of Total          | 10.7% | 1.4%  | 12.1%  |
| Relationship-building individual   | Count               | 30    | 24    | 54     |
|                                    | % within \$Ltraits  | 55.6% | 44.4% |        |
|                                    | % within var_Gender | 35.7% | 42.9% |        |
|                                    | % of Total          | 21.4% | 17.1% | 38.6%  |
| Imaginative & Creative             | Count               | 31    | 18    | 49     |
|                                    | % within \$Ltraits  | 63.3% | 36.7% |        |
|                                    | % within var_Gender | 36.9% | 32.1% |        |
|                                    | % of Total          | 22.1% | 12.9% | 35.0%  |
| Goal oriented                      | Count               | 53    | 45    | 98     |
|                                    | % within \$Ltraits  | 54.1% | 45.9% |        |
|                                    | % within var_Gender | 63.1% | 80.4% |        |
|                                    | % of Total          | 37.9% | 32.1% | 70.0%  |
| Driven (hungry for success)        | Count               | 16    | 11    | 27     |
|                                    | % within \$Ltraits  | 59.3% | 40.7% |        |
|                                    | % within var_Gender | 19.0% | 19.6% |        |
|                                    | % of Total          | 11.4% | 7.9%  | 19.3%  |
| Coaches the team                   | Count               | 22    | 19    | 41     |
|                                    | % within \$Ltraits  | 53.7% | 46.3% |        |
|                                    | % within var_Gender | 26.2% | 33.9% |        |
|                                    | % of Total          | 15.7% | 13.6% | 29.3%  |
| Total                              | Count               | 84    | 56    | 140    |
|                                    | % of Total          | 60.0% | 40.0% | 100.0% |

Table 6: Cross tabulation of multiple response set against gender

## 6. Conclusion

This study of millennial leadership styles and traits, conducted cross sectional, based on gender has been instrumental in understanding the patterns of leadership behavior and expectations of millennials. Besides uncovering the presence of gender bias and helping show that men and women have slightly different preferences in leaders, it has also shown that the millennial generation is very interested in leadership opportunities and many of them consider themselves leaders, even today in their social circles. We may see the rise of perhaps the most ambitious generation in the workforce that demands more and more in order to build their careers, The entire generation places special emphasis on the values of honesty, respect of other's opinion and transparency in the top qualities they wish to see in their leader, and also as qualities they would bring to the workplace as leaders themselves. While it is clear that a lot of work still remains to be done to retain women in the workforce and to empower them to excel in leadership roles, they clearly are interested in rising up the organizational ladder. Finally, millennials may lead to more open, flexible and democratic work places as these are the styles of leadership they prefer the most, along with learning opportunities created by a coaching leader- giving good signals to those organizations that are making an effort to build —learning organizationsl.

Thus it can be conclusively said that the generation may bring a welcome positive change in the workplace in capacities of leaders and may do even better if gender equal opportunities are created and talent is nurtured.

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