

EXPECTATIONS OF GENERATION Z TOWARDS CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP

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Purpose: The aim of this study was to identify differences in the perception of individual traits that make up charismatic leadership, as defined by the subscales of the Conger-Kanungo Charismatic Leadership Scale. The study examines which leadership qualities are most and least valued by Generation Z and explores whether statistically significant differences exist in respondents' evaluations of these traits.

Design/methodology/approach: The research utilized the Conger-Kanungo Charismatic Leadership Scale, adapted to measure Generation Z's specific expectations of charismatic leadership. Data were collected through paper (PAPI) and online (CAWI) surveys distributed via social media. The sample included 394 Generation Z respondents with backgrounds in social sciences, who evaluated the traits on a five-point scale. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis) as well as one-way ANOVA and Scheffé's post-hoc test to assess statistically significant differences across subscales.

Findings: The highest ratings were given to "Personal Risk" and "Strategic Vision and Articulation," suggesting that Generation Z values leaders who are willing to take risks and who communicate a clear, inspiring vision. "Sensitivity to Member Needs" also received high ratings, emphasizing the importance of empathy in building trust-based relationships. Lower ratings for "Sensitivity to the Environment" and "Unconventional Behavior" indicate that these qualities are seen as less critical in charismatic leadership by Generation Z.

Research limitations/implications: The study's limitations include a lack of sample representativeness, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Future research could explore cross-cultural differences in the perception of charismatic leadership, analyze variations in expectations by industry or sector, and investigate how individual personality traits affect leadership expectations.

Originality/value: This study contributes to both academic knowledge and practical applications by providing insights into Generation Z's expectations of leadership in the workplace. The findings enrich the field of human resource management literature and offer valuable guidance to organizations seeking to align leadership strategies with the values and preferences of young employees.

Keywords: Generation Z, charismatic leadership, Conger-Kanungo Scale, leader traits, leadership preferences

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

Today's labor market is a space where multiple generations coexist, each bringing unique experiences, values, and approaches to work. In organizations, representatives of four generations meet: the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and the younger generations Y and Z, with each group shaped by different historical events, social conditions, and economic contexts (Sidor-Rzadkowska, 2018, 88). This generational diversity poses a challenge for companies, which must adapt their management style to meet the specific needs and expectations of various age groups (Różańska-Bińczyk, 2022). Differences in values and priorities, work approaches, and motivations require managers to be flexible and aware of the complexities involved in managing a diverse team (Warwas, Wiktorowicz, Jawor-Joniewicz, 2018, p. 22).

In this context, the integration of the youngest generation—Generation Z—into the labor market holds particular significance. Although there is extensive literature on generational differences, Generation Z remains relatively underexplored due to its brief presence in the workforce (Dwivedula, Singh, Azaran, 2019). As members of this generation grow in influence and numbers, organizations must adapt their management strategies and develop new approaches to effectively engage and attract young employees. Forecasts suggest that by 2028, as much as 58% of the global workforce may consist of Generation Z, which will significantly impact organizational culture and employee management practices (Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu, 2022).

The entry of this generation into the labor market has far-reaching implications. Employers face the challenge not only of adapting existing management models but also of redesigning their recruitment strategies and hiring processes. Companies that fail to consider the specific needs of this group may encounter difficulties in recruitment and retention, especially amid increasing competition for talent (Leoński, Pluta, Wiczorek-Szymańska, 2020). Addressing the needs and expectations of Generation Z is critically important in both academic and practical contexts; only by adapting management strategies to meet their requirements can organizations fully leverage the potential that this transformative generation brings to the market.

2. Review of the literature

Generation Z, consisting of individuals born after 1995 who are now entering the workforce, brings a new approach to professional life and a fresh set of values that differ significantly from those of older generations. Growing up in a fully digital world, this generation has unparalleled access to information, fostering in them the ability to quickly assimilate knowledge and a strong capacity for multitasking. Accustomed to immediate access to data, they are less patient with

traditional, slow decision-making processes, often prioritizing speed over accuracy in task execution (Grabiwoda, 2018, p. 51). Their work style and expectations differ markedly from those of previous generations, who generally valued stability, hierarchy, and loyalty to the organization. Focused on personal growth and the achievement of their own goals, Generation Z tends to challenge these traditional values.

Generation Z demonstrates a high level of career flexibility and is more inclined toward frequent job changes, seeking not so much a stable career as continuous opportunities for growth and skill acquisition (Muster, 2020, p. 134). They also prefer clear and transparent career paths but without long-term commitments to a single organization, which contrasts with Millennials and Baby Boomers, for whom loyalty was foundational in professional relationships. Generation Z is less interested in job stability and places a greater emphasis on individual challenges and rapid advancement. This mindset leads them to question traditional hierarchical structures, as they expect more partnership-oriented relationships with their supervisors (Rogozińska - Pawełczyk et al., 2019, p. 29). This need for equality in the workplace shapes their attitude toward authority—young employees expect leaders not only to set rules but also to create space for dialogue and to be open to their ideas and needs.

Research shows that maintaining a work-life balance is essential for Generation Z. They are strongly attached to flexibility, both in terms of working hours and location. Remote or hybrid work is not seen as a privilege but as a standard they expect, stemming from their view of work as one of many aspects of life rather than its central focus (Berge, 2019; Vilanova, 2019). Gen Z expects leaders to respect these needs and for organizations to create a work environment that preserves their work-life balance (Lima-Vargas, Cervantes-Aldana, Lima-Vargas, 2022). Supervisors who fail to understand this may struggle to maintain their engagement and loyalty, further highlighting Generation Z's distance from traditional authoritarian structures.

At the same time, the literature emphasizes Generation Z's strong focus on individualism. Members of Generation Z place a high priority on self-development and achieving personal goals, which may reduce their inclination for long-term collaboration and make building loyalty to employers more challenging. This tendency to view themselves as independent of the organization does not support respect for traditional hierarchies and corporate values (Leśniak, 2022, 69). These employees expect organizations to be flexible, providing them with space for individual growth and autonomy, often regardless of norms that governed older generations. As a result, Generation Z's approach to work is sometimes perceived as less empathetic or team-oriented, while also being more demanding of employers.

Additionally, members of Generation Z prefer a work environment that does not rely on rigid rules and authority based solely on hierarchical position, but rather on partnership and authenticity. They expect their supervisors to be not only professionals but also leaders who are open to building trust-based, transparent relationships. A lack of such an approach can quickly lead to a decrease in their engagement and motivation, making them more likely to seek other employment opportunities (Generation Z in the Labor Market, 2019). Generation Z rarely

accepts authority uncritically; on the contrary, their natural approach involves questioning the status quo. This tendency can create tension in their relationships with supervisors if they are not given the space to express their opinions and participate in decision-making processes.

The characteristics of Generation Z and its tendency to question authority highlight the need to examine its approach to leadership, particularly charismatic leadership. Since charismatic leadership relies on building authority and influence based on the leader's personal traits rather than solely on formal position, it may align with the specific expectations of Generation Z. However, it is worth exploring how this generation defines effective leadership and which qualities it values, so that leaders can better adapt their style to meet the needs of young employees. Research on Generation Z's preferences for charismatic leadership could provide organizations with valuable insights, enabling them to more effectively address the needs of this younger generation, foster engagement, and enhance long-term loyalty.

To examine how Generation Z perceives charismatic leadership, statements from the Conger-Kanungo Charismatic Leadership Scale were adapted—a psychometric tool designed to assess the level of charismatic traits in a leader. This scale enables evaluation of the extent to which leaders possess charismatic qualities essential for effective team leadership and inspiring its members. It is based on the assumption that charismatic leadership results from a combination of the leader's personality, behaviors, and subordinates' perceptions. This latter aspect, the perception of the leader as charismatic, largely depends on the leader's ability to inspire, motivate, and create a shared vision of the future (Conger et al., 2000). Numerous studies confirm that this scale is a reliable and valid tool in various cultural and organizational contexts (Conger et al., 1997; Halverson et al., 2004; Rowold, Kersting, 2008; Lian et al., 2011).

The Conger-Kanungo Scale encompasses various dimensions that collectively aim to capture the essence of a leader's charisma. Within this tool, three categories of behaviors are distinguished:

1. Strategic behaviors – related to the ability to create a vision and persuade the team to realize.
2. Prosocial behaviors – reflecting concern for the well-being and needs of others.
3. Leadership behaviors – focused on inspiring, delegating, and managing the team.

These three categories form the foundation for more specific subscales, which enable a deeper analysis of selected aspects of charismatic leadership. The detailed subscales that make up the Conger-Kanungo Scale include (Conger, Kanungo, 1994; Conger et al., 1997):

1. Strategic Vision and Articulation – the leader's ability to create and communicate an inspiring vision that mobilizes the team to take action.
2. Environmental Sensitivity – the ability to analyze situations, understand context, and adapt actions to changing conditions.
3. Sensitivity to Member Needs – the leader's capacity for empathy, understanding team members' needs and concerns, which fosters trust and engagement.
4. Personal Risk – the leader's willingness to take risks in pursuing the vision, demonstrating courage and commitment to the organization's success.

5. Unconventional Behavior – the leader's approach to problem-solving in a non-traditional manner, enhancing their charisma.

These five subscales allow for the measurement of specific aspects of charismatic leadership and provide measurable categories for analysis. The Conger-Kanungo Scale is widely used in both academic research on leadership and in management practice, especially for leader assessment and development. It enables organizations to identify leaders with high charismatic potential and to evaluate leadership effectiveness in terms of motivating and inspiring teams to achieve shared goals.

3. Research methods

The aim of this text was to identify differences in the perception of specific traits that constitute charismatic leadership, as defined by the subscales of the Conger-Kanungo Scale. The following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: Which charismatic leadership traits are rated the highest and which the lowest by respondents?

RQ2: Are there statistically significant differences in the perception of specific charismatic leadership traits among respondents?

The following research hypothesis was proposed:

H: There are statistically significant differences in the perception of specific charismatic leadership traits, with traits related to personal risk and the leader's strategic vision being rated higher than traits such as environmental sensitivity or unconventional behavior.

The analyses presented in this article are part of a broader study conducted among Generation Z representatives in 2022 (from January to December). Data were collected using two methods: a paper-based survey (PAPI) and an online survey (CAWI). The online survey was hosted on Google Drive, and a link to it, along with a request to complete it, was distributed via social media. Respondents who completed the survey were also asked to share it further among their acquaintances.

For the analyses included in this article, only questionnaires completed by individuals with a background in social sciences were used ($n=394$). This group consisted of 232 women (59%) and 162 men (41%). Respondents rated individual statements related to charismatic leadership using a five-point scale, where 1 meant "strongly disagree" and 5 meant "strongly agree." The responses obtained were coded and subjected to statistical analysis using the Statistica 14.0 software.

The reliability of the adopted measurement scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a value of 0.80. This result indicates a high level of internal consistency for the tool, confirming the scale's reliability in measuring the variables under study.

Several key statistical tools were used in the data analysis, enabling a detailed assessment of differences in the perception of specific charismatic leadership traits. First, basic descriptive statistics, such as mean, median, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis, were calculated for each of the Conger-Kanungo Scale subscales analyzed. These indicators allowed for determining the overall rating level for each trait, as well as understanding the distribution characteristics, including consistency and potential asymmetries in the ratings.

To test the significance of differences between the various subscales of charismatic leadership, a one-way within-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The ANOVA results indicated statistically significant differences between the mean ratings for different subscales. To identify which subscales differed significantly from each other, a post-hoc analysis was performed using Scheffé's test. This test, known for its conservativeness, maintains a low risk of Type I error in multiple comparisons, ensuring the reliability and accuracy of the obtained results.

4. Analysis and discussion

Table 1 presents the basic descriptive statistics for the variables studied in the context of the charismatic leadership subscales.

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics of the Studied Variables

Subscales	M	Me	SD	S	K
Strategic Vision and Articulation	3,95	4,00	0,62	-0,65	0,65
Sensitivity to the Member Needs	3,77	3,67	0,77	-0,36	-0,07
Sensitivity to the Environment	2,48	2,50	1,10	0,39	-0,62
Personal Risk	4,18	4,33	0,71	-0,75	0,04
Unconventional Behavior	3,11	3,00	0,96	-0,05	-0,40
Charismatic leadership	3,66	3,61	0,50	0,10	-0,13

Note: M- mean, Me – median, SD - standard deviation, S – skewness, K - kurtosis.

Source: own study.

The results indicate generally high ratings for key charismatic leadership traits, with moderate variability in the outcomes. The mean values for most subscales are in the upper range of the scale, suggesting a positive perception of the analyzed traits within the studied group, particularly regarding the leader's ability to formulate and communicate a vision and willingness to take personal risks. Low standard deviations and similar values between the mean and median in most subscales indicate relatively consistent ratings of specific leadership aspects, which may reflect a stable perception of charismatic traits in leaders among respondents.

The highest ratings were given to the subscales "Personal Risk" (4.18) and "Strategic Vision and Articulation" (3.95), suggesting that a leader's willingness to take risks and ability to create and communicate an inspiring vision are perceived as key elements of charismatic leadership by respondents. In contrast, the lowest mean rating was for the "Sensitivity to the Environment" subscale (2.48), indicating that respondents rated leaders' environmental sensitivity relatively low compared to other aspects of leadership. This subscale also shows high variability in ratings, suggesting diverse perceptions of this trait, and a positive skewness (0.39) indicates a slight tendency toward lower ratings. This may suggest that environmental sensitivity is a less valued trait among respondents in the context of charismatic leadership.

The analysis of skewness and kurtosis for the remaining subscales shows that the distribution of results for most of them is close to normal, with minor deviations. This indicates a uniform perception of leadership traits among respondents, suggesting stability in the ratings and a solid understanding of the specific aspects of charismatic leadership being analyzed. The mean value of the overall charismatic leadership rating (3.66), along with the median (3.61), confirms a generally positive perception of charismatic leader traits among respondents. Additionally, the low standard deviation (0.50) and a distribution close to normal indicate consistency and stability in the opinions of the participants.

The mean value of the overall charismatic leadership rating is 3.64, suggesting that respondents perceive leaders' charismatic traits positively. The median (3.61), close to the mean, indicates consistency in ratings across the respondent group. The low standard deviation (0.48) suggests uniformity in respondents' opinions, reflecting a stable perception of leader charisma. The skewness value (0.16) indicates a slight rightward asymmetry, suggesting a mild tendency toward higher ratings. A kurtosis of 0 confirms that the distribution is close to normal, with a typical level of concentration around the mean.

To determine differences between the subscales, a one-way within-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. For the respondents, the F-value reached 336.47 ($F(4, 1572) = 336.47$), which was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating significant differences among the analyzed groups in this sample. The η^2 value was 0.46, meaning that 46% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by differences between groups. This suggests a strong between-group effect.

Given the above, post-hoc analyses were conducted using Scheffé's test. A number of statistically significant differences were observed (Table 2).

The analysis of Scheffé's test results revealed that all differences between the charismatic leadership subscales are statistically significant, confirming a varied perception of specific traits of a charismatic leader. Respondents attribute the greatest importance to traits related to personal commitment and the leader's courage. The score for the "Personal Risk" subscale (4.18) indicates that a leader's willingness to take risks in pursuing goals is essential for the perception of their charisma and genuine commitment to organizational objectives. The high rating for "Strategic Vision and Articulation" (3.95) emphasizes that the ability to create and effectively

communicate an inspiring vision is highly valued and is crucial for effectively motivating the team.

Table 2.

Results of Scheffé's Test for Charismatic Leadership Subscales

Subscales	Strategic Vision and Articulation M = 3,95	Sensitivity to the Member Needs M = 3,77	Sensitivity to the Environment M = 2,48	Personal Risk M = 4,18	Unconventional Behavior M = 3,11
Strategic Vision and Articulation	-	p = 0,023	p < 0,001	p = 0,001	p < 0,001
Sensitivity to the Member Needs	p = 0,023	-	p < 0,001	p < 0,001	p < 0,001
Sensitivity to the Environment	p < 0,001	p < 0,001	-	p < 0,001	p < 0,001
Personal Risk	p = 0,001	p < 0,001	p < 0,001	-	p < 0,001
Unconventional Behavior	p < 0,001	p < 0,001	p < 0,001	p < 0,001	-

M- mean.

Source: own study.

Similarly, "Sensitivity to Member Needs" (3.77) is also highly valued, suggesting that empathy and understanding of team members are essential components of charismatic leadership. This trait supports the development of trust-based relationships, which is crucial for long-term team engagement.

Lower ratings for "Unconventional Behavior" (3.11) and "Sensitivity to the Environment" (2.48) indicate that while an innovative approach and the ability to adapt to context are added advantages, they are not seen as essential elements of charismatic leadership. Respondents clearly prefer leader traits focused on a clear vision, commitment, and willingness to take risks, suggesting that these attributes are perceived as most important in building charisma and effectively influencing the team.

Based on the conducted analyses, it can be concluded that the initial hypothesis—H: there are significant differences in the ratings of specific charismatic leadership traits, with traits related to personal risk and the leader's strategic vision receiving higher ratings compared to environmental sensitivity and unconventional behavior—was positively confirmed.

The results of the Conger-Kanungo scale analysis indicate that the surveyed Generation Z representatives rate key charismatic leadership traits highly, though the intensity of these ratings varies depending on the specific nature of each trait. Compared with the existing literature, these findings provide a deeper understanding of how the attitudes of the respondents align with the broader context of both earlier and more recent studies on charismatic leadership.

The highest rating among respondents was given to the "Strategic Vision and Articulation" subscale, suggesting that survey participants highly value leaders who can formulate an inspiring and clear vision. This result aligns with previous studies that emphasize the fundamental importance of vision in building trust and mobilizing a team (Avolio, Yammarino, 2013). Respondents, similar to Generation Z in other studies, place particular importance on authenticity and the significance of organizational goals (Aguas, 2019; Schroth, 2019). The higher ratings

for this subscale suggest that a leader's clear vision plays a crucial role in respondents' positive perception of the leader.

The "Personal Risk" subscale also received high scores, indicating that respondents value leaders' willingness to take risks. This trait enhances their perception of the leader's authenticity and increases trust, particularly in dynamic and unpredictable work environments, as confirmed by other studies on Generation Z (Francis, Hoefel, 2018; Schroth, 2019). In this context, respondents rate highly those leaders who take risks, viewing this trait as one that strengthens the leader's credibility.

High scores in the "Sensitivity to Member Needs" subscale indicate that leader empathy is crucial for respondents. They place great importance on inclusivity and support in the workplace, and an empathetic approach by the leader fosters mutual trust and long-term engagement. This finding aligns with previous studies highlighting the importance of close relationships between Generation Z representatives and their supervisors, as well as the need for open communication (Zivkovic, 2022; Goh, Lee, 2018; Francis, Hoefel, 2018; Schroth, 2019).

The "Sensitivity to the Environment" subscale received the lowest ratings, suggesting that respondents consider leaders' ability to adapt to their surroundings to be less important in the context of charismatic leadership. In the literature, environmental sensitivity under changing conditions is regarded as an important trait, particularly in crisis situations (Van Knippenberg, Sitkin, 2013), which may indicate some differences between the survey results and other studies on Generation Z. However, in crisis situations, the importance of this trait may increase (Schroth, 2019), pointing to a potential area for further research.

The "Unconventional Behavior" subscale also received lower scores in the analysis, indicating that although respondents view a leader's non-standard approach positively, it is not considered a key aspect of charismatic leadership. This aligns with previous research, which suggests that unconventional behavior can support the perception of charisma but is not a primary element of effective leadership (House, 1977; Antonakis, Bastardo, Jacquart, Shamir, 2016).

5. Conclusion

The analyses conducted indicate that Generation Z respondents positively rate key traits of charismatic leadership, particularly a leader's ability to formulate an inspiring vision and willingness to take personal risks. The highest-rated subscales—"Personal Risk" and "Strategic Vision and Articulation"—confirm that Generation Z especially values authentic leaders who are willing to take risks in pursuing their vision, as this allows them to effectively mobilize their team and gain trust. Similarly, the high rating for the "Sensitivity to Member Needs" subscale

underscores the importance of empathy in building long-lasting, trust-based relationships with team members, which is highly valued in inclusive work environments.

Lower ratings for "Sensitivity to the Environment" and "Unconventional Behavior" suggest that traits such as adaptability and a non-standard approach are not considered key elements of charismatic leadership for this group. However, in crisis situations, adaptability may become more significant, as indicated by recent studies. Statistical analyses confirm that the differences between ratings of specific traits are significant, highlighting Generation Z's varied perception of these aspects.

Overall, the study results align with both earlier and recent research on charismatic leadership, suggesting that key traits for Generation Z include a leader's authenticity, vision, and ability to build close relationships, while innovation and adaptability to the environment play a secondary role.

A limitation of this study is the lack of sample representativeness, which prevents full generalization of the results to the entire Generation Z population. Nevertheless, the findings may prove valuable for both the academic community and practitioners. The study results enrich cohort theory by providing insight into young employees' perceptions of charismatic leadership, which may help in better understanding their expectations of leaders in the workplace. Additionally, the study makes a significant contribution to the human resource management literature by analyzing Generation Z's leadership trait preferences, which is crucial for shaping management strategies in dynamically changing organizations.

Future research could explore several key areas that would deepen the findings obtained in this study. It would be worthwhile to consider analyzing differences in the perception of leadership competencies arising from different cultural traditions. Such a study would examine whether expectations of charismatic leadership within Generation Z differ depending on the cultural context. A significant extension would also be to investigate whether respondents' preferences vary by industry or sector in which they are employed, which could provide valuable insights into specific leadership competencies desired in different labor market sectors. Another interesting research direction would be to explore whether specific personality traits influence expectations regarding leadership competencies. For example, analyzing how different personality types assess and respond to various management styles could help better match leaders to the needs of teams with diverse personalities. Such a study could deepen our understanding of the interaction between personality and the perception of charismatic leadership, which would be valuable for both leadership theory and the practice of managing teams in diverse work environments.

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