SILESIAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY PUBLISHING HOUSE

SCIENTIFIC PAPERS OF SILESIAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY 2026
ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT SERIES NO. 255

# KEY COMPETENCIES OF A LEADER IN MANAGING EMPLOYEES IN THE ERA OF REMOTE WORK

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**Purpose:** This article aims to identify and explore the key competencies of a leader in managing employees in a remote working model.
**Design/methodology:** The research was conducted in Q1 2024 on a sample of 636 professionally active respondents, diverse in generation and with experience in remote working. The spatial scope of the study covered the Lower Silesia area. The aim and formulated research questions implied the selection of the research methodology. For this article, a diagnostic survey was used, including the CAWI survey technique. The research tool was a survey questionnaire based on two measurement scales: ordinal and nominal (binary and categorical). Descriptive statistics methods (mean, median, and standard deviation) were used in the statistical study, and tests were performed: Kruskal-Wallis, U Mann-Whitney, Dunn-Bonferroni.
**Findings:** Based on the analysis, three main groups of leader competencies were identified, which the respondents considered crucial in managing employees in a remote working environment. Competencies related to clear communication, efficient work organization, responsibility, decision-making, and the ability to use modern technology were rated highest. Equally important were competencies related to emotional support, motivating employees, and caring for their psychological well-being.
**Practical implications:** The article's authors would like to provide practical recommendations for HR managers who want to effectively manage people working remotely in a turbulent work environment. Due to the limitations of the research sample, it is essential to underline that generalizing the research results must be done with caution.
**Originality/value:** The article extends existing research on e-leadership by identifying competencies crucial for managing multigenerational and gender-diverse teams remotely.
**Keywords:** leader, competencies, remote working, generations.
**Category of the paper:** research paper.

## 1. Introduction

Today's labour market is undergoing dynamic transformations linked to increasing digitalization and demographic changes. One of the most visible trends of recent years is the spread of the remote working model. Although it offers new organizational opportunities, remote working has significantly changed how professional duties are performed and the relationship between employees and supervisors. Remote working, therefore, compounds the challenges of building relationships and mutual trust. An additional factor determining the quality of management is the demographic diversity of employees, particularly in terms of their generational affiliation. Representatives of four generations differ in terms of their values, working styles, and preferences for communication methods. In this context, the role of the leader becomes crucial - not only as a coordinator of tasks but, above all, as an integrator and facilitator of cooperation. It therefore seems necessary to identify the key competencies of the leader as a person responsible not only for the team's performance but also for 'remotely' building the organizational culture, integrating employees, and developing interpersonal and digital competencies.

This article aims to identify and explore the key competencies of a leader in managing employees operating in a remote working model.

## 2. Literature review

Today's organizations operate in a typically BANI (Brittle, Anxious, Non-linear, Incomprehensible) world. Effectively managing distributed, remote, or hybrid teams in this turbulent environment is increasingly challenging. The dynamic growth of these working models, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, has redefined traditional perceptions of leaders, their roles, and the competencies required.

Already a dozen years ago, Wang and Haggerty (2009) highlighted the need for specific competencies to enable effective remote work. They highlighted the importance of self-efficacy, social skills in a virtual environment, and technological competence. Authors Lönnblad and Vartiainen (2012) divided the competencies required for remote working into three categories: team competencies, personal competencies (relating to employees and leaders), and specific competencies of leaders. Sawatzky, R.I. and Sawatzky, N.J. (2022) extended this classification to include communication, self-direction, self-motivation, self-discipline, critical thinking, initiative, flexibility, empathy, and trustworthiness. In contrast, Newman and Ford (2020) and Turesky et al. (2020) further emphasized the need for leaders to promote the culture of trust, shared responsibility, and transparency required in a remote working environment. Given the above, as Kiljunen (2021) notes, relying too heavily on

hierarchical structures can lead to communication isolation and weaken collaboration in a team, especially in a distributed team. Therefore, leaders should aim to increase employee autonomy by promoting supportive leadership (Sjöblom et al., 2022). Thus, a leader who has been operating mainly in a virtual environment for several years must not only be technologically competent but, above all, develop the skills to manage relationships, build trust at a distance, sustain the motivation of the team, and support its development under conditions of limited face-to-face contact (Sawatzky, R.I., Sawatzky, N.J., 2022).

Current reports also provide interesting data in this aspect. As the Gallup report (2025) highlights, the key needs of people working remotely include trust, empathy, stability, and hope. Leaders, as people who play an important role in the day-to-day functioning of employees, right after the family, should actively respond to these needs. Indeed, their presence in employee relationships correlates strongly with employee well-being. According to a World Economic Forum (WEF, 2025) report, leaders' most desirable competencies are mental toughness, flexibility, agility, social influence, creativity, and readiness to learn. Soft competencies, including managing change and adapting to uncertainty, are critical in this area. The above results are also confirmed by the GFKM report 'Year of the Leader 2025', indicating the particular importance of decisiveness, courage, the ability to motivate a team, taking care of mental health (own and employees), and building trust as the foundations of modern leadership.

Nowadays, multigenerational teams, made up of representatives of generations BB, X, Y, and Z, are an additional challenge for leaders (Kocot et al., 2021). Studies of the literature on the subject indicate the existence of many intergenerational differences that can significantly affect the meaning of work and related expectations characteristic of representatives of each generation (Chomątowska et al., 2025; Jeruszka, Wolan-Nowakowska, 2020; Nieżurawska-Zając, 2020; Smolbik-Jęczmień, Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, 2017; Samsel, 2022; Suchecka, 2023; Taylor, 2018; Waszkiewicz, 2022; Żarczyńska-Dobiesz et al., 2024). According to the article's authors, each generation has different experiences, needs, and cognitive patterns.

As Makowski (2023) highlights, understanding generational differences and their impact on working styles and expectations of leaders is crucial for effective leadership. Leaders should demonstrate flexibility, adaptability, and the ability to create an inclusive and collaborative environment between generations. A team leader should understand that each generation, shaped by different historical and technological experiences, manifests different values, communication styles, and work expectations (Newman, Ford, 2020). Managing remote multi-generational teams requires integrating different working styles, maintaining team cohesion, and sustaining team engagement. Active listening, empathy, openness to development, and searching for compromises are key here (Podgórska, 2022; Flaszewska, Szymańska, 2024; Nwoko, Yazdani, 2024). As a result, the expectations of leaders managing distributed teams also vary by generation. Previous research shows that younger generations (Y and Z) value leaders who are open to new technologies and have a flexible approach to work (Oleksa-

Marewska, Tokar, 2022). In contrast, older employees (generations BB and X) emphasize stability and formal structures (Juchnowicz, Kinowska, 2022).

## 3. Methods

The authors of this article set themselves the objective of identifying and exploring the key competencies of a leader in managing employees operating in a remote working model. In the context of such a goal, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Which competencies of a leader managing employees working in a remote working environment are most important, and which are relatively less important?
2. What differences exist in assessing the desired competencies of a leader managing remote employees, taking into account the criterion of generational affiliation?
3. What differences exist in assessing the desirable competencies of a leader managing remote employees, considering the gender criterion?

The research was conducted in Q1 2024 on a sample of 636 professionally active respondents with experience in remote working. The structure of the respondents varies (Table 1).

**Table 1.**
*Statistics of sociodemographic variables of the studied population*

| Criterion | | n | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Year of birth | 1957-1964 | 6 | 0.9 |
| | 1965-1980 | 81 | 12.7 |
| | 1981-1994 | 99 | 15.6 |
| | After 1995 | 450 | 70.8 |
| Gender | Female | 444 | 69.8 |
| | Male | 189 | 29.7 |
| | Other | 3 | 0.5 |
| Sector | Trade | 90 | 14.2 |
| | Production | 78 | 12.3 |
| | Services | 300 | 47.2 |
| | Other | 168 | 26.4 |
| Organization size | Micro | 420 | 66.0 |
| | Small | 69 | 10.8 |
| | Medium | 147 | 23.1 |
| | Large | 0 | 0.0 |
| Work experience | Less than 1 year | 84 | 13.2 |
| | 1-2 years | 192 | 30.2 |
| | 3-5 years | 186 | 29.2 |
| | 6-10 years | 33 | 5.2 |
| | 11-20 years | 69 | 10.8 |
| | Over 20 years | 72 | 11.3 |

Source: original work based on conducted research.

The study group is dominated by people born after 1995 (generation Z; 70.8%), while the smallest group comprises those born between 1957 and 1964 (generation BB; 0.9%). Most respondents are women (69.8%), most people work in the service sector (47.2%), 66.0% are employed in micro-enterprises. The spatial scope of the survey covered the Lower Silesian area. The aim and formulated research questions implied the selection of research methods. A diagnostic survey was used, including the CAWI survey technique. The research tool was a survey questionnaire based on ordinal and nominal (binary and categorical) scales. The statistical design used descriptive statistics methods (mean, median, and standard deviation), and tests were performed: Kruskal-Wallis, U Mann-Whitney, Dunn, and Bonferroni. The above-mentioned statistical analysis was used for the age variable of the respondents and their belonging to four generations of workers: BB, X, Y, and Z[1]. On the other hand, the U-test Mann-Whitney was applied to the respondents' gender variable.

## 4. Results

The key question posed to respondents was, 'In your opinion, is there a personality of a remote leader managing a distributed team?'. More than 4/5 of the respondents answered this question in the affirmative (84.0%). On average, one in ten (11.3%) do not know whether such a personality exists, with only 4.7% of respondents denying it. The respondents were asked about more than 30 competencies predisposing a leader to work remotely to rate them on a scale from 1 to 5 (Table 2). The results were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean-M, median-Me, standard deviation-SD). Analysing table 2 in the assessment of the study population, it can be generally concluded that the most important competencies predisposing a leader to work remotely are: clear and effective communication, work organization, priority management, decision-making and problem-solving skills, providing support to employees, and taking care of their mental health and work-life balance.

[1] Due to the unrepresentative size of the BB group and the 'other' gender, the decision was made to exclude them from further analysis.

**Table 2.**
*Assessment of competencies that predispose a leader to work remotely*

| Competence | M | Me | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Planning and organising remote working | 4.45 | 5.00 | 0.88 |
| Clear and lucid communication of objectives and expectations of | 4.63 | 5.00 | 0.75 |
| Management of priorities | 4.38 | 5.00 | 0.87 |
| A clear time frame of availability for employees | 4.24 | 5.00 | 0.94 |
| Balance between the leader's time flexibility and setting rigid time frames | 3.93 | 4.00 | 0.99 |
| Recognising the needs and expectations of remote workers | 4.16 | 4.00 | 0.91 |
| Ability to delegate tasks | 4.29 | 5.00 | 0.95 |
| Knowing how to motivate remote workers | 4.31 | 5.00 | 0.98 |
| Providing support to employees | 4.33 | 5.00 | 0.85 |
| Communicating clearly | 4.45 | 5.00 | 0.83 |
| Ability to actively listen to employees | 4.31 | 5.00 | 0.91 |
| Conducting meetings effectively | 4.24 | 4.00 | 0.93 |
| Providing ongoing feedback | 4.32 | 5.00 | 0.89 |
| Empathy | 3.78 | 4.00 | 1.04 |
| Managerial courage | 3.99 | 4.00 | 0.99 |
| Assertiveness | 3.92 | 4.00 | 0.99 |
| Efficiency | 4.12 | 4.00 | 0.92 |
| Punctuality | 3.86 | 4.00 | 1.07 |
| Responsibility | 4.36 | 5.00 | 0.84 |
| Patience | 4.01 | 4.00 | 0.99 |
| Industriousness | 4.09 | 4.00 | 0.95 |
| Openness to change | 4.15 | 4.00 | 0.90 |
| Maintaining the discipline of remote workers | 4.13 | 4.00 | 0.98 |
| Monitoring of work results | 4.17 | 4.00 | 0.90 |
| Ability to adapt to new technologies | 4.38 | 5.00 | 0.84 |
| Building relationships and strengthening bonds despite social distance | 4.14 | 4.00 | 0.99 |
| Efficient decision-making in crisis | 4.36 | 5.00 | 0.87 |
| Dealing effectively with conflicts at a distance | 4.32 | 5.00 | 0.89 |
| Readiness for continuous improvement | 4.01 | 4.00 | 0.96 |
| Recognising the need to look after the mental health of remote workers | 4.24 | 4.00 | 0.90 |
| Taking care of work-life balance | 4.31 | 5.00 | 0.91 |

Source: original work based on conducted research (scale 1-5, where 1-competence is definitely not important, 2-rather not important, 3-difficult to say, 4-rather important, and 5-definitely important).

The next stage of the analysis was to look at the examined competencies from the perspective of the opinions of each generation and gender criterion. The study used descriptive statistics variables (respectively: M - mean, Me - median; SD - standard deviation), the Kruskal-Wallis test with a post-hoc paired test, and the U Mann-Whitney test (Table 3).

**Table 3.**

*Statistics of the Kruskal-Wallis test and differences of respondents in terms of generational affiliation, and the U Mann-Whitney test and differences in terms of gender*

| Competence | Generation | | | | | | | | | Kruskal – Wallis test | | Gender | | | | | | U Mann-Whitney test | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1965 – 1980 (n=81) | | | 1981 -1994 (n=99) | | | After 1995 (n=450) | | | | | Woman (n=444) | | | Man (n=189) | | | | |
| | M | Md | SD | M | Md | SD | M | Md | SD | H | p | M | Md | SD | M | Md | SD | Z | p |
| Planning and organizing remote working | 4.33 | 5.00 | 1.11 | 4.42 | 5.00 | 0.94 | 4.48 | 5.00 | 0.83 | 0.183 | 0.913 | 4.53 | 5.00 | 0.77 | 4.27 | 5.00 | 1.10 | -1.420 | 0.156 |
| Clear and lucid communication of objectives and expectations of employees | 4.37 | 5.00 | 1.01 | 4.70 | 5.00 | 0.77 | 4.66 | 5.00 | 0.69 | 3.702 | 0.157 | 4.78 | 5.00 | 0.57 | 4.29 | 5.00 | 0.99 | -4.487 | 0.000 |
| Management of priorities | 4.26 | 5.00 | 1.10 | 4.45 | 5.00 | 0.87 | 4.39 | 5.00 | 0.83 | 0.502 | 0.778 | 4.52 | 5.00 | 0.70 | 4.05 | 4.00 | 1.11 | -3.078 | 0.002 |
| A clear time frame of availability for employees | 4.19 | 5.00 | 1.14 | 4.24 | 4.00 | 0.83 | 4.25 | 5.00 | 0.93 | 0.134 | 0.935 | 4.35 | 5.00 | 0.83 | 3.95 | 4.00 | 1.13 | -2.240 | 0.025 |
| Balance between the leader's time flexibility and setting rigid time frames | 3.67 | 4.00 | 0.92 | 3.94 | 4.00 | 0.97 | 3.97 | 4.00 | 1.01 | 3.512 | 0.173 | 4.05 | 4.00 | 0.90 | 3.65 | 4.00 | 1.12 | -2.502 | 0.012 |
| Recognizing the needs and expectations of remote workers | 3.89 | 4.00 | 1.01 | 4.15 | 4.00 | 0.94 | 4.21 | 4.00 | 0.89 | 2.848 | 0.241 | 4.32 | 4.50 | 0.84 | 3.79 | 4.00 | 0.97 | -3.950 | 0.000 |
| Ability to delegate tasks | 3.85 | 4.00 | 1.17 | 4.39 | 5.00 | 0.86 | 4.35 | 5.00 | 0.91 | 6.138 | 0.046 | 4.41 | 5.00 | 0.83 | 4.03 | 4.00 | 1.14 | -2.276 | 0.023 |
| Knowing how to motivate remote workers | 4.00 | 4.00 | 1.11 | 4.42 | 5.00 | 1.06 | 4.33 | 5.00 | 0.94 | 4.522 | 0.104 | 4.43 | 5.00 | 0.84 | 4.02 | 4.00 | 1.21 | -2.105 | 0.035 |
| Providing support to employees | 4.22 | 4.00 | 0.93 | 4.30 | 4.00 | 0.85 | 4.35 | 5.00 | 0.84 | 0.703 | 0.704 | 4.44 | 5.00 | 0.75 | 4.08 | 4.00 | 1.02 | -2.525 | 0.012 |
| Communicating clearly | 4.11 | 4.00 | 0.97 | 4.52 | 5.00 | 0.83 | 4.49 | 5.00 | 0.80 | 6.396 | 0.041 | 4.61 | 5.00 | 0.67 | 4.06 | 4.00 | 1.05 | -4.082 | 0.000 |
| Ability to actively listen to employees | 4.19 | 4.00 | 1.00 | 4.36 | 5.00 | 0.93 | 4.31 | 5.00 | 0.90 | 0.713 | 0.700 | 4.47 | 5.00 | 0.77 | 3.92 | 4.00 | 1.10 | -3.704 | 0.000 |
| Conducting meetings effectively | 4.26 | 5.00 | 1.02 | 4.30 | 4.00 | 0.85 | 4.22 | 4.00 | 0.94 | 0.205 | 0.903 | 4.41 | 5.00 | 0.78 | 3.84 | 4.00 | 1.14 | -3.526 | 0.000 |
| Providing ongoing feedback | 3.89 | 4.00 | 1.01 | 4.15 | 4.00 | 0.94 | 4.43 | 5.00 | 0.83 | 11.185 | 0.004 | 4.48 | 5.00 | 0.77 | 3.92 | 4.00 | 1.02 | -4.183 | 0.000 |
| Empathy | 3.48 | 4.00 | 1.09 | 3.97 | 4.00 | 1.07 | 3.79 | 4.00 | 1.03 | 3.552 | 0.169 | 3.93 | 4.00 | 0.99 | 3.43 | 4.00 | 1.09 | -3.211 | 0.001 |
| Managerial courage | 3.81 | 4.00 | 1.18 | 4.09 | 4.00 | 1.04 | 3.99 | 4.00 | 0.94 | 1.052 | 0.591 | 4.11 | 4.00 | 0.94 | 3.67 | 4.00 | 1.05 | -3.107 | 0.002 |
| Assertiveness | 3.63 | 4.00 | 1.04 | 4.06 | 4.00 | 0.93 | 3.93 | 4.00 | 0.99 | 3.333 | 0.189 | 4.02 | 4.00 | 0.92 | 3.65 | 4.00 | 1.09 | -2.346 | 0.019 |
| Efficiency | 3.59 | 4.00 | 1.19 | 4.27 | 4.00 | 0.91 | 4.17 | 4.00 | 0.85 | 7.588 | 0.023 | 4.24 | 4.00 | 0.86 | 3.84 | 4.00 | 1.02 | -2.859 | 0.004 |
| Punctuality | 3.93 | 4.00 | 1.11 | 3.88 | 4.00 | 0.93 | 3.83 | 4.00 | 1.10 | 0.269 | 0.874 | 3.94 | 4.00 | 1.01 | 3.68 | 4.00 | 1.19 | -1.337 | 0.181 |
| Responsibility | 4.07 | 4.00 | 1.17 | 4.48 | 5.00 | 0.76 | 4.38 | 5.00 | 0.78 | 2.066 | 0.356 | 4.43 | 5.00 | 0.80 | 4.21 | 4.00 | 0.92 | -1.773 | 0.076 |
| Patience | 3.48 | 4.00 | 1.22 | 4.21 | 4.00 | 0.78 | 4.07 | 4.00 | 0.95 | 7.339 | 0.025 | 4.11 | 4.00 | 0.93 | 3.79 | 4.00 | 1.08 | -2.038 | 0.042 |
| Industriousness | 3.63 | 4.00 | 1.28 | 4.09 | 4.00 | 0.91 | 4.17 | 4.00 | 0.87 | 4.617 | 0.099 | 4.22 | 4.00 | 0.88 | 3.79 | 4.00 | 1.05 | -2.940 | 0.003 |
| Openness to change | 3.89 | 4.00 | 1.12 | 4.12 | 4.00 | 0.89 | 4.21 | 4.00 | 0.85 | 1.878 | 0.391 | 4.22 | 4.00 | 0.81 | 3.97 | 4.00 | 1.08 | -1.294 | 0.196 |
| Maintaining discipline of remote workers | 3.96 | 4.00 | 1.09 | 3.97 | 4.00 | 1.16 | 4.19 | 4.00 | 0.92 | 1.438 | 0.487 | 4.22 | 4.00 | 0.88 | 3.92 | 4.00 | 1.17 | -1.473 | 0.141 |
| Monitoring of work results | 3.93 | 4.00 | 1.04 | 4.12 | 4.00 | 0.82 | 4.21 | 4.00 | 0.89 | 2.456 | 0.293 | 4.30 | 4.00 | 0.80 | 3.86 | 4.00 | 1.06 | -2.843 | 0.004 |
| Ability to adapt to new technologies | 3.85 | 4.00 | 0.95 | 4.52 | 5.00 | 0.67 | 4.45 | 5.00 | 0.82 | 14.460 | 0.001 | 4.50 | 5.00 | 0.76 | 4.10 | 4.00 | 0.95 | -3.329 | 0.001 |
| Building relationships and strengthening bonds despite social distance | 4.11 | 4.00 | 0.93 | 4.27 | 4.00 | 0.91 | 4.12 | 4.00 | 1.02 | 0.678 | 0.712 | 4.28 | 5.00 | 0.90 | 3.83 | 4.00 | 1.11 | -3.058 | 0.002 |
| Efficient decision-making in crisis situations | 4.00 | 4.00 | 1.07 | 4.42 | 5.00 | 0.71 | 4.41 | 5.00 | 0.85 | 4.900 | 0.086 | 4.49 | 5.00 | 0.77 | 4.08 | 4.00 | 1.02 | -2.896 | 0.004 |
| Dealing effectively with conflicts at a distance | 4.07 | 4.00 | 0.96 | 4.42 | 5.00 | 0.83 | 4.33 | 5.00 | 0.89 | 3.256 | 0.196 | 4.45 | 5.00 | 0.81 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 1.00 | -3.484 | 0.000 |
| Readiness for continuous improvement | 3.56 | 4.00 | 0.89 | 3.97 | 4.00 | 1.02 | 4.10 | 4.00 | 0.94 | 9.277 | 0.010 | 4.11 | 4.00 | 0.88 | 3.81 | 4.00 | 1.09 | -1.729 | 0.084 |
| Recognizing the need to look after the mental health of remote workers | 3.93 | 4.00 | 0.96 | 4.21 | 4.00 | 0.93 | 4.30 | 5.00 | 0.89 | 4.911 | 0.086 | 4.39 | 5.00 | 0.83 | 3.89 | 4.00 | 0.99 | -3.789 | 0.000 |
| Taking care of work-life balance | 4.11 | 4.00 | 0.97 | 4.21 | 4.00 | 1.02 | 4.36 | 5.00 | 0.88 | 2.601 | 0.272 | 4.43 | 5.00 | 0.78 | 4.03 | 4.00 | 1.12 | -2.344 | 0.019 |

Source: original work based on conducted research.

Analysing table 3, it can be concluded that, generally, the oldest participants in the study, i.e. X, consistently rated the key competencies related to managing employees while working remotely lower, especially in terms of new technologies, delegating tasks and communicating information. Younger groups, especially representatives of Generation Z, indicated a much higher need for the remote leader to have the above competencies. This may be due to the peculiarities of this generation and their high openness to modern technologies and related flexible forms of work. In addition, analysis of the results using the U Mann-Whitney test showed statistically significant differences in the assessment of leader competencies between women and men. The largest of these were in communication, monitoring and organizing work, and employee support. Women also pay more attention to psychological and social aspects, such as empathy, mental health care, relationship building and conflict management.

## 5. Discussion

Earlier research by the authors confirmed that although all generations have adapted well to remote work, respondents believe this work model requires slightly different competencies in employees than in stationary work (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz et al., 2024). However, referring to the authors' current research, it is stated that employees and leaders need appropriate competencies in changing working conditions that will allow them to be successful leaders during remote work. Given the above, answering the first research question, the results obtained identified three levels of importance.

Three competency areas were identified as the most important. Although they differ in their specifics, they were rated as almost equally important for a managerial leader in a remote working environment. The first area is communication and organizational competence, such as clear and transparent communication of goals and expectations for employees (M = 4.63), planning and organizing remote working (M = 4.45), communicating day-to-day information (M = 4.45) and the ability to manage priorities (M = 4.38). Such high scores underline the importance of clear and effective communication in the reality of remote working, where the lack of physical contact increases the risk of misunderstandings and disorganization. These findings are in line with the findings of other authors (Sinclair et al., 2021; Kiljunen et al., 2021; Nwoko, Yazdani, 2024), who believe that leaders should have advanced communication skills while using technology to bridge the physical distance and keep team members engaged. Using a variety of communication modalities and channels, such as video conferencing, virtual check-ins, instant messaging and online platforms, can ensure effective communication and build a sense of connectedness and staying on track among team members. Remote leaders managing a dispersed and diverse workforce should invest in developing communication to foster interaction among them (Kiljunen et al., 2021; Nwoko, Yazdani,

2024). The ability to adapt communication styles to the preferences of different generations is also key. Younger people prefer instant messaging and digital platforms, while older people still value 'face-to-face' contact and use traditional channels such as email and phone calls (Sinclair et al., 2021). A second important area is competencies related to job monitoring and accountability. These include adapting to new technologies (M = 4.38), agile crisis decision-making and leader accountability (M = 4.36), dealing effectively with conflict and providing ongoing feedback (M = 4.32). Accordingly, the modern leader should organize and monitor the team's work, make quick decisions, effectively resolve conflicts, and efficiently use new technologies, which are the foundation of effective remote working. Similar conclusions were proposed by Kiljunen et al., who state that remote leaders should invest in developing e-leadership competencies, especially the ability to use technology to communicate effectively and monitor work performance (2021). On the other hand, the third area of most important competencies concerns motivating and supporting employees in a broad sense. These include, respectively, motivating remote workers (M = 4.31), supporting them (M = 4.33), caring for their work-life balance (M = 4.31), and caring for their mental health (M = 4.24). These results are no surprise to the authors, as they remain consistent with previous assumptions and observations. One of the weaknesses of remote working, often highlighted by employees, is the lack of work-life balance. Moreover, leaders have to deal with the problem of employee isolation and psychological well-being (Sjöblom et al., 2022). As highlighted by other authors, remote work, while offering flexibility, has also blurred the lines between work and personal life, intensifying the need for leaders to support employees in achieving a healthy work-life balance (Iqbal et al., 2020). In addition, when caring for the productivity and well-being of employees, the leader needs to understand the specific work dynamics of different generations (Hassan, 2021).

The second level of importance is formed by flexibility and social relations competencies. These include monitoring work performance (M = 4.17), openness to change (M = 4.15), building relationships and strengthening bonds despite the distance (M = 4.14), and maintaining discipline (M = 4.13).

In contrast, competencies such as managerial courage (M = 3.99), assertiveness (M = 3.92), punctuality (M = 3.86), and empathy (M = 3.78) were rated relatively lowest, but still high (respectively third level of importance; $M < 4.0$). The empathy score that the researchers received was somewhat surprising. In the context of contemporary leadership models, such as servant leadership or leadership with compassion, empathy is considered a core competence. However, there are several possible reasons for this outcome. Firstly, it is more difficult for employees to perceive empathetic behaviour in a remote working environment, as communication lacks many non-verbal signals. Secondly, respondents may not have had experience with empathetic leaders. Additionally, remote work is often emphasised on organizational, technological and communication competencies, which are more 'visible' in day-to-day collaboration. Finally, generational differences and the resulting perception of this

competence confuse it with indulgence or excessive emotionality. However, according to Sinclair et al., leaders, in addition to being technologically literate, should demonstrate the ability to actively listen, empathise and give constructive feedback (2021).

According to the second research question, analysis of the Kruskal-Wallis test results showed statistically significant differences between age groups for several key competencies of leaders. The significance values indicate the need for post hoc Dunn tests to determine which groups have significant differences. For the competence of delegating tasks ($p = 0.046$), representatives of Generation X scored the lowest mean score ($M = 3.85$), while younger representatives of Y and Z rated this competence higher ($M = 4.39$; $M = 4.35$). Thus, the Dunn test indicates significant differences between the oldest and the two younger groups ($p < 0.05$). Another competence was the clear communication of current information, which differed significantly between generations ($p = 0.041$). The lowest rating was again found among those from generation X ($M = 4.11$), while Y and Z rated this competence higher ($M = 4.52$; $M = 4.49$). Again, Dunn's test showed significant differences between the oldest group and the two younger groups ($p < 0.05$). When it came to providing ongoing feedback ($p = 0.004$), the oldest generation rated it lowest ($M = 3.89$), and the youngest generation rated it highest ($M = 4.43$). The results of the Dunn test indicate significant differences between X and Z ($p < 0.01$). When analysing the following competency tested, resourcefulness ($p = 0.023$) was rated higher by the younger generations, Y and Z ($M = 4.27$; $M = 4.17$), compared to X ($M = 3.59$). Thus, Dunn's test showed significant differences between X and Y, Z ($p < 0.05$). Analogous results were provided by the analysis of patience ($p = 0.025$). The oldest rated it lowest ($M = 3.48$) and the younger (Y and Z) higher ($M = 4.21$ and $M = 4.07$). Dunn's test again indicated a statistically significant difference. Given the above, the most significant difference was competence, such as adapting to new technologies ($p = 0.001$). The oldest participants rated it lowest ($M = 3.85$), while younger participants rated it significantly higher ($M = 4.52$; $M = 4.45$). Dunn's test indicated significant differences between X and Y, Z ($p < 0.01$).

The last competence where the difference between the generations studied was statistically significant was the leader's continuous willingness to improve ($p = 0.010$). The lowest mean score occurred in X ($M = 3.56$) and the highest in Z ($M = 4.10$). Dunn's test confirmed a significant difference between the oldest and youngest group ($p < 0.05$). The results may indicate that representatives of Generation X, unlike the younger groups (Y and Z), do not perceive an equally strong need for continuous improvement by remote leaders. According to the authors, X's indications may be due to their greater professional experience vis-à-vis younger ones and their trust in their developed leadership patterns, fatigue and scepticism towards the ‘developmental fashion’ very popular among younger employees. This is because generations Y and Z have been brought up in a culture of ongoing feedback and a constant need to upskill and reskill their competencies.

Responding to the final research question concerning gender differences in assessing desired leader competencies, the collected results were analysed and interpreted using the U Mann-Whitney test. Significant differences in the assessment of leader competencies ($p < 0.05$) apply to as many as 25 competencies out of 31 reviewed (table 3). It is worth noting that in all of the following cases, women rated the competencies in question as more important than men.

Given the above, it is worth emphasising that the observation of such numerous and statistically significant differences in the assessment of leader competencies between women and men confirms the validity of the formulated research question. The most significant differences in assessing leader competencies concerned five of them. The first is conducting meetings and gatherings effectively (difference of 0.57) (woman - W (M = 4.41), man - M (M = 3.84). However, this result did not surprise the article's authors, given women's negative experiences participating in remote meetings during the pandemic. As the authors' previous research showed, women working remotely felt tired of combining work with family and domestic responsibilities, taking on the role of their children's teachers, available to all 'twenty-four-seven'. They care more about others and not enough about themselves (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz et al., 2023). For women, it is important to organize the meeting meaningfully, with an orderly structure and a concrete flow.

The other four differences are: giving ongoing feedback 0.56 (W:4.48, M:3.92), clear communication: 0.55 (W:4.61; M:4.06), etc., active listening skills 0.55 (W:4.47; M:3.92), recognizing the needs and expectations of remote workers 0.53 (W:4.32; M:3.79). As emphasized by the women, they care about the quality of interaction in remote working, and they expect the leader to care about the climate, clarity, and ongoing contact with employees. The analysis carried out showed no statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) in terms of gender, and ($p > 0.05$) concerned only six competencies: planning and organizing remote work, punctuality, responsibility, openness to change, maintaining the discipline of remote workers, and readiness for continuous improvement.

## 6. Summary

The analysis identified three primary levels of leader competencies, which the respondents considered key in managing employees in a remote working environment. The highest-rated competencies were communication, organizing, monitoring, responsibility, and using modern technology. The leader's emotional support, motivation, and psychological well-being competencies were also important. Considering the generational affiliation criterion, it was noted that representatives of Generation X consistently gave lower importance ratings to several competencies compared to younger generations. These were particularly true for: delegating

tasks, communicating information, resourcefulness, patience, and adapting to new technologies. The results suggest that both younger generations have higher expectations of the competencies of a remote leader than the representatives of Generation X. Furthermore, the analysis revealed gender differences in the assessment of leader competencies. Women were significantly more likely than men to rate competencies above all related to communication, including the organization of meetings, support, caring for relationships and the mental health of employees, and empathy. However, this may be evidence of a different understanding of the role and tasks of a leader in remote working by women and men. The women expect a more holistic approach by the leader, taking care of such important well-being. The lack of such an approach results in professional burnout, lack of meaning, and social isolation, a real risk for a remote leader.

In summary, the research results indicate that an effective leader in a remote working environment can manage in an 'asynchronous world'. On the one hand, he or she skilfully organizes and coordinates the team's activities. On the other hand, he or she provides emotional support to employees, flexibly combining operational efficiency with concern for their well-being. It is worth emphasizing that, in reality, it is no longer sufficient for such a leader to be familiar with digital tools. Competences such as empathy, the ability to actively listen, and an individual approach to employees are becoming crucial.

The authors intend to continue their research in the indicated topics, focusing on empathy and the leader's emotional intelligence in the remote management of a multigenerational team. Further studies are also planned on trust-building mechanisms in teams operating in a remote working environment.

Due to the limitations of the research sample, it is essential to underline that generalizing the research results must be done with caution.

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