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## **Faculty Perceptions of the Essential Elements Of Leadership Across Generations and Sex**

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### **Introduction**

Higher education as an industry is in the midst of disruptive change (Thompson & Miller, 2018). A turbulent environment coupled with the economic uncertainty of the last decade has left institutions with a diminished sense of security for the financial future (Hannay & Fretwell, 2011). This was true pre-Covid but is even more true now. To better confront the complex issues and problems facing contemporary institutions of higher education, it is important to understand how different stakeholders perceive effective leadership (Davis & Jones, 2014). It is widely accepted that leading in higher education simply isn't the same as leading a Fortune 500 company (Buller, 2013). In fact, little research exists concerning the specific ways that faculty want to be led, so it is important to understand the range of opinions and experiences of faculty as they relate to perceptions of effective leadership, especially in terms of generational cohorts and biological sex.

Some research regarding generational expectations in the workplace exists in certain industries like health care, government agencies, hospitality, and manufacturing (Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt, & Gade, 2012; Gursoy et al., 2013; Joshi et al., 2011; Joshi, Dencker, Franz, & Matocchio, 2010) as does research measuring differences in perceptions of effective leadership between biological sexes (Cheng & Lin, 2012; Girard, 2010; Maxfield & Shapiro, 2010; Muchiri, Cooksey, Di Milia, & Walumbwa, 2011; Murray & Chua, 2012; Vezzosi, 2012; Walker, Ilardi, & McMahon, 1996). Higher education, however, has not been studied proportionally to other sectors in relation to leadership perceptions across the aforementioned demographics, especially among faculty. To assist in addressing this gap, an exploratory study was conducted at a Midwestern state university to measure the differences in faculty perceptions of essential elements of effective leadership between generational cohorts and biological sexes.

Currently, there are as many as four generations serving in faculty roles at institutions of higher education (Clark, 2017). A 2009 study indicated that the number of full-time faculty members at colleges and universities over the age of 70 increased three-fold since 1994 (Gilroy, 2009). Currently, institutions of higher education employ a greater proportion of persons over the age of 65 than do any other occupational group (Kaskie, 2016). As the number of female faculty members continues to rise, the cross section of diversity in the academy continues to expand (Shreffler, Shreffler, & Murfee, 2019). This increased diversity among faculty makes studying generational and gender perceptions of leadership an area in need of thorough investigation (Hannay & Fretwell, 2011; Heyns & Kerr, 2018).

Research has shown there are differences in leadership styles and workplace expectations across the generational spectrum (Salahuddin, 2010). Behaviors, attitudes, and values of generations are influenced by historical, economic, and social experiences (Angeline, 2011). Members of each generation enter the workforce with differing expectations of their employers in terms of what effective leadership means (Sujansky, 2004). This gap in behaviors, attitudes, and expectations is known as the generational divide (Teng, 2020). Leaders must engage followers in ways that align with their predisposed notions of effective leadership (Pierro, Kruglanski, & Raven, 2012).

**Generational Cohort.** The term generational cohort is explanatory terminology for particular age groupings with significant common experiences (Gilbaugh, 2009). Currently, researchers are able to define five generational cohorts: The Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. The Silent Generation is comprised of the oldest individuals of all the generational cohorts ranging from those who were born in 1935 up through 1945 (Zickurh, 2010). Baby Boomers were born between 1946 and 1964 (Zickurh, 2010). Generation X includes individuals born between 1965 and 1976, followed by the Millennial cohort, born between 1977 and 1992. Finally, the youngest cohort is Generation Z, whose members include those born 1993 through present day (2021). Given the year in which this study was implemented, it is realistic to presume those in the Generation Z cohort are not employed as faculty members thus, this cohort was excluded.

**Generational Cohorts and Leadership.** The assessment of generational differences potentially affecting perceptions of leadership has been well documented (Busch, Venkitachalam, & Richards, 2008; Deal, Stawiski, Gentry, Graves, & Weber, 2013; Ferri-Reed, 2013; Gentry, Griggs, Deal, Mondore, & Cox, 2011; Gursoy, Geng-Qing Chi, & Karadag, 2013; Joshi, Dencker, & Franz, 2011; Murphy, 2012; Murray, 2011; Nelsey, & Brownie, 2012; Zickurh, 2010). In today's multigenerational workforce, generations spanning from the Silent Generation to Millennials work side by side. This combination of generations and their expectations can be a significant source of organizational conflict. Generational cohorts typically hold differing perceptions of each other, potentially contributing to conflict and misunderstanding in the workplace (Meriac, Woehr, & Banister, 2010). Each generational cohort has established values and perceptions of leadership effectiveness (Gentry et al., 2011; Murray, 2011; Nelsey et al., 2012; Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal, & Brown, 2007; Taylor & Stein, 2014). An exploratory study conducted by Geng-Qing Chi et al. (2013) outlined the perceptions that hospitality employees have toward younger and older first line managers by generation cohort and job position across the generations. The findings supported the premise that there are significant differences in employees' perceptions of younger and older managers.

A 2010 study by Meriac et al. which spanned 12 years and 1860 participants, reported different interpretations of similar experiences across generational cohorts. This study further demonstrated the differences and potential friction that can occur when multiple generations work together, especially in terms of communication style. Lack of knowledge concerning generational communication patterns can lead to confrontations and misunderstandings (Stevenson, 2020). Further, members of younger generations often hold high levels of ambition and desire to make a mark on the organization, which can be a source of conflict with older workers (Browne, 2021).

**Biological Sex and Leadership Perceptions.** Many attempts have been made to explain differences in leadership perceptions between males and females, but the findings have been equivocal (Murray & Chua, 2012). As leadership is a multifaceted process, it is exceedingly difficult to gauge the specific perceptions of different demographics (Crawford et al., 2005; Girard, 2010); therefore, the body of research is inconclusive and worthy of closer scrutiny.

Some studies have found males and females perceive elements of effective leadership differently (Muchiri, Cooksey, Di Milia, & Walumbwa, 2011). For example, studies on the use of authority show that males view authority as more critical to effective leadership as they are more likely to use positional power and authority than females (Rosner, 2011). Other studies found males to be more susceptible to influence and view its use in leadership as more necessary than do females (Girard, 2010; Vezzosi, 2012). In contrast, Cheng and Lin (2012) concluded that perceptions of emotional intelligence are not affected by biological sex. Maxfield and Shapiro (2010) conducted a study which resulted in similar findings but focused on perceptions of risk-taking.

A number of research studies have found biological sex differences consistent with differences in perceptions of leadership (Girard, 2010; Vezzosi, 2012; Walker et al., 1996). Other research found no notable differences in perceptions of leadership based on biological sex (Cheng & Lin, 2012; Maxfield & Shapiro, 2010). Currently, there is not agreement in published research regarding the role that biological sex plays in perceptions of effective leadership (Murray & Chua, 2012).

### **Essential Elements of Leadership**

Leadership studies scholars have focused a great deal of attention on finding out what makes leadership effective. While it is difficult to name any elements of leadership as being essential to every situation, consistent themes across the discipline were identified for the purpose of this study. The construct of the essential elements of leadership used in this study was organically developed by analyzing textbooks and course materials currently being used by a leadership studies program at a regionally accredited institution as well as the National Leadership Education Research Agenda (NLERA) (Andenoro et.al, 2013; Boleman & Deal, 2008; Crawford et al., 2005; Carnegie, 1935; Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Goertzen, Kastle, Klaus, & Greenleaf, 2019; Hackman, 2002; Howell & Costley, 2006; Krzyzewski & Phillips, 2000; Lewis & D'Orso, 1999; Northouse, 2013).

All but one of the essential elements of leadership identified for this study can be found in the background/foundation of research priorities, the research priorities themselves, or in the applied outcomes of the NLERA. The only theme that was not included in the NLERA but included in this study was *use of authority*. It was included because of the autocratic nature embraced by members of the Silent Generation. This generation tends to value a top-down, chain-of-command style centered around use of authority (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011). This was a major part of the industrial leadership paradigm common during the Silent Generation's formative years (Crawford et al., 2005). See Table 1 for an overview of the essential elements of leadership identified for this study.

Table 1  
Essential Elements of Leadership – Overview

Essential Element	Definition	Supporting Evidence
Influence	An interactive process in which people attempt to convince other people to believe and/or act in certain ways (Rost, 1993).	(Sassenberg & Hamstra, 2016); (Bélanger, Pierro, & Kruglanski, 2015); (Ahn et al., 2013); (Bode & Shah, 2014); (Yukl, 2008).
Promoting Teamwork	The ability to lead teams and the process of facilitation of teamwork (Hackman, 2002).	(Kootsookos, Edwards-Hart, & Steiner, 2013); (Nelsey et al., 2012); (Sandoff & Nilsson, 2016)
Change Facilitation	Refusing to accept the status quo, creation of a vision for future success, initiation of the change process, and sustaining the change (Crawford et al., 2005).	(Boleman & Gallos, 2011);(Kotter, 2012); (Mitchell, 2013); (Welch, 2005)
Use of Authority	A major element of Autocratic leadership. Autocratic leadership uses rules and regulations to control activities and relationships (Crawford et al., 2005).	(Kapoor & Solomon, 2011); (Northouse, 2012)
Collaborative Dialogue	Employee centered, participative, and socio-emotionally oriented dialogue (Crawford et al., 2005).	(Ferri-Reed, 2013); (Northouse, 2012); (Sassenberg & Hamstra, 2016)
Risk Taking	Viewed through two different lenses: risk in demonstrating the will to confront and challenge and risk in empowerment and giving control for the purpose of	(Maxfield & Shapiro, 2010); (Ridenour & Twale, 2005); (Everett, Homestead, & Drisko, 2007); (Brungardt &

	subordinate development (Crawford et al., 2005).	Crawford, 1999); (Northouse, 2012)
Followership	An interactive role individuals play that compliments the leadership role and is equivalent to in importance for achieving organizational goals (Howell & Costley, 2006).	(Rost, 1993); (Kouzes & Posner, 2007); (Cruz, 2014)
Emotional Intelligence	Ability, capacity, or skill to identify, assess, manage, and control the emotions of oneself, others, and groups (Ealais & George, 2012).	(Cooper, 1997); (Fitzgerald & Schutte, 2010); (Goleman, 1998)
Ethical Behavior	Obeying the law and adhering to rules and regulations.	(Crawford et al., 2005); (Rost, 1993); (Plinio, 2009)
Self-Awareness	Understanding individual strengths and weaknesses in self (Rath & Conchie, 2008).	(Maxwell, 2002); (Rath & Conchie, 2008); (Horowitz & Van Eeden, 2015)

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### **Current Study**

While there is a growing body of research regarding leadership across generational cohorts, very little exists that directly applies to faculty in higher education. Thus, the purpose of this study was to identify generational cohorts' perceptions of essential elements of leadership held by faculty members at a Midwestern state university and bridge the defined gap between the study of generational perceptions of leadership and the specific vocation of teaching in higher education. Another focus of the study was to examine whether biological sex within each generational cohort of faculty affects perceptions of essential elements of leadership. This study provides a clearer understanding of the leadership perceptions of higher education faculty across the generational cohorts. Moreover, faculty and administrators who are perceived as leaders will benefit from understanding the perceptions of essential elements of leadership across the generation spectrum in the specific context of their vocation. In addition, researchers studying leadership will gain a better understanding of faculty perceptions of leaders. Those in leadership roles must understand their followers' expectations if they are to fully engage their potential (Howell & Costley, 2006).

## Research Questions

The difference in perceptions of essential elements of leadership crossing the generational spectrum is well documented (Busch et al., 2008; Deal et al., 2013; Dries & Peperman, 2008; Ferri-Reed, 2013; Gentry et al., 2011; Gursoy et al., 2013; Joshi et al., 2011; Murphy, 2012; Murray, 2011; Nelsey & Brownie, 2012; Zickurh, 2010). The current study strived to examine the following research questions:

*RQ1: What do faculty members at a Midwestern state university perceive to be essential elements of leadership?*

*RQ2: To what extent is there a difference in perceptions of essential elements of leadership across faculty generational cohorts (i.e., Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial) at a Midwestern state university?*

*RQ3: To what extent are the differences in essential elements of leadership affected by biological sex among a Midwestern state university's faculty of Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial generations?*

This quantitative study sought to identify the differences in perceptions of essential elements of leadership held by faculty members at a Midwestern state university. In addition, this study identified differences in perceptions of each of the three major generational cohorts to which faculty members belonged and examined the impact of biological sex within each of these generations on faculty members' perceptions of essential elements of leadership.

## Methods

**Research Design.** A quantitative methods research design was utilized in this study. Faculty members' perceptions of the ten essential elements of leadership (influence, promoting teamwork, change facilitation, use of authority, collaborative dialogue, risk taking, followership, emotional intelligence, ethical behavior, and self-awareness) was identified as the dependent variable, with generational cohort (i.e., Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial) and biological sex (male and female) acting as the independent variable. SPSS Statistics software was used to analyze these data. A Factorial Analysis of Variances (ANOVA) was used to investigate the research questions specific to this study.

**Participants.** Originally, 399 full time, domestic, on-campus faculty members at the Midwestern state university were recruited for this study. Following the screening procedures and excluding participants who completed less than or equal to 10% of the survey, the final sample include 105 individuals. Of these participants, 47 identified as male and 58 as female. In terms of generational cohorts, 43 were classified as Baby Boomers, 32 as Generation Xers, and 30 as Millennials. Finally, participants must have been teaching at least one face-to-face class on campus at the time of this study to qualify for participation.

**Procedures.** Following IRB approval, a link to *The Essential Elements of Leadership Survey* was sent to each eligible faculty member in a recruitment email using the Midwestern state university email system. Subjects were required to read the informed consent statement and acknowledge the voluntary nature of their participation prior to participating in the study. Participants were given a window of three weeks to participate in the study using the online assessment tool, Survey Monkey. During the survey window of availability, two additional emails were sent to all eligible participants reminding them of the survey and requesting their participation.

**Materials.** *The Essential Elements of Leadership Survey* consisted of two sections. The first section asked participants to convey perceptions of essential elements of leadership. The second section collected demographic information to ascertain the participant's generational cohort and biological sex. Each of the participants self-identified the generational cohort to which he or she belonged, using the generational definitions from the *Generations 2010* research study conducted by Zickurh (2010) of the Pew Research Center.

Additional demographic questions asked participants if they had ever served in the military and racial/ethnic background. These additional items were put in place to prevent participants from answering questions based on preconceived notions of how their generation or biological sex should behave. The first section of the *Essential Elements of Leadership Survey* used a 5-point-Likert scale (i.e., 5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 2 = Disagree, and 1 = Strongly Disagree) to measure participant responses. These responses allowed for a calculation of the average for each of the variables. Of the ten dependent variables in this study, seven required more than one survey item to measure the leadership element. Each time more than one survey item was used to measure a variable, an average was calculated.

To design the survey, the researcher consulted the NLERA and leadership textbooks currently being used by a leadership studies program at a regionally accredited institution (Boleman & Deal, 2008; Crawford et al., 2005; Carnegie, 1935; Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Goertzen, et al., 2019; Hackman, 2002; Howell & Costley, 2006; Krzyzewski & Phillips, 2000; Lewis & D'Orso, 1999; Northouse, 2010). The questions for the *Essential Elements of Leadership Survey* were developed using themes consistent across texts and the NLERA. All but one of the essential elements of leadership that were identified for this study can be found in the background/foundation of research priorities, the research priorities themselves, or in the applied outcomes of the NLERA. The only theme that was not included in the NLERA but included in this study was use of authority. It was included because of the autocratic nature largely embraced by members of The Silent Generation (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011).

## Results

One sample t-tests were conducted to identify the extent to which faculty perceived each of the ten elements of effective leadership ( $p=.05$ ), measured against a null value of 3. Results showed that all ten identified elements were deemed essential. See Table 2 for a complete list of descriptive information.



Table 2

Leadership Element	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Self-Awareness	4.64	.45
Ethical Behavior	4.55	.65
Promoting Teamwork	4.54	.67
Followership	4.27	.51
Collaborative Dialogue	4.15	.80
Emotional Intelligence	4.14	.62
Change Facilitation	4.13	.68
Risk Taking	3.90	.73
Use of Authority	3.36	.65
Influence	3.20	.59

Note. *M* and *SD* represent mean and standard deviation, respectively.

**Influence.** A between subject's 2x3 factorial ANOVA was conducted to assess all variables in this study. Two independent variables (generational cohort and biological sex) with two levels for the variable of biological sex (i.e., male and female) and three levels for the variable of generational cohort (i.e., Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennials) were tested to measure perceptions of influence as an essential element of leadership. Results indicate no significant main effect when examining generational cohort [ $F(2, 105) = 2.45, p = .09, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .05$ ] or biological sex [ $F(1, 105) = .05, p = .82, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .001$ ]. However, there was a significant interaction when examining the impact of generational cohort and biological sex on perception of influence as an essential element of leadership [ $F(2, 105) = 3.40, p = .04, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .001$ ]. Participants who identified as males and were part of the Millennial cohort ( $M=2.86, SD=.59$ ) disagreed that influence was an essential element of leadership when compared to Millennial, female participants who remained neutral ( $M=3.17, SD=.37$ ). See Table 3 for a complete list of descriptive information.

**Promoting Teamwork.** Two independent variables (generational cohort and biological sex) with two levels for the variable of biological sex (i.e., male and female) and three levels for the variable of generational cohort (i.e., Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennials) were tested to measure perceptions of promoting teamwork as an essential element of leadership. Results indicate no significant main effect when examining generational cohort [ $F(2, 105) = 1.13, p = .33, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .02$ ]. However, when examining biological sex, there was a significant main effect [ $F(1, 105) = 6.15, p = .02, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .06$ ] indicating those who reported they were female ( $M=4.76; N=58$ ) indicated higher agreement with promoting teamwork as essential element of leadership when compared to male ( $M=4.52; N=47$ ) participants. Although results indicate a statistically significant main effect, the difference between biological sex means are in close proximity of one another, suggesting the practical significance may be minimal. Moreover, these main effects were not qualified by a significant interaction [ $F(2, 105) = .33, p = .72, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .01$ ].

Table 3  
Means and standard deviations for influence as a function  
of a 2(biological sex) X 3(generational cohort) design

		<b>Generational Cohort</b>					
		Baby Boomer		Generation X		Millennial	
<b>Biological Sex</b>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Male</b>		3.22	.47	3.39	.51	2.86	.59
<b>Female</b>		3.32	.41	3.05	.59	3.17	.37

*Note.* *M* and *SD* represent mean and standard deviation, respectively.

**Change Facilitation.** Two independent variables (generational cohort and biological sex) with two levels for the variable of biological sex (i.e., male and female) and three levels for the variable of generational cohort (i.e., Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennials) were tested to measure perceptions of change facilitation as an essential element of leadership. Results indicate no significant main effect when examining generational cohort [ $F(2, 105) = 1.23, p = .30, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .02$ ] and biological sex [ $F(1, 105) = .55, p = .46, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .01$ ]. The lack of main effect on generational cohort and biological sex resulted in no significant interaction [ $F(2, 105) = .30, p = .74, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .01$ ].

**Authority.** Two independent variables (generational cohort and biological sex) with two levels for the variable of biological sex (i.e., male and female) and three levels for the variable of generational cohort (i.e., Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennials) were tested to measure perceptions of authority as an essential element of leadership. Results indicate no significant main effect when examining generational cohort [ $F(2, 105) = .45, p = .64, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .01$ ] and biological sex [ $F(1, 105) = 1.55, p = .22, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .02$ ]. The lack of main effect on generational cohort and biological sex resulted in no significant interaction [ $F(2, 105) = 1.40, p = .25, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .03$ ].

**Collaborative Dialogue.** Two independent variables (generational cohort and biological sex) with two levels for the variable of biological sex (i.e., male and female) and three levels for the variable of generational cohort (i.e., Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennials) were tested to measure perceptions of collaborative dialogue as an essential element of leadership. Results indicate no significant main effect when examining biological sex [ $F(1, 105) = .09, p = .77, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .001$ ]. However, there was a main effect when examining generational cohort [ $F(2, 105) = 3.68, p = .03, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .07$ ], indicating Baby Boomer participants ( $M=4.51; N=43$ ) reported a higher level of agreement when viewing collaborative dialogue as an essential element of leadership when compared to Generation Xers ( $M=4.36; N=32$ ) and Millennials ( $M=4.15; N=30$ ). Although results do show there is a statistically significant main effect, the difference between generational cohort means are in close proximity of one another, suggesting the practical significance may be minimal.

Finally, these main effects were not qualified by a significant interaction [ $F(2, 105) = 1.56, p = .22$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ ].

**Risk Taking.** Two independent variables (generational cohort and biological sex) with two levels for the variable of biological sex (i.e., male and female) and three levels for the variable of generational cohort (i.e., Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennials) were tested to measure perceptions of risk taking as an essential element of leadership. Results indicate no significant main effect when examining generational cohort [ $F(2, 105) = 1.09, p = .34$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ ] and biological sex [ $F(1, 105) = .96, p = .41$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ ]. The lack of main effect on generational cohort and biological sex resulted in no significant interaction [ $F(2, 105) = .70, p = .50$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ ].

**Followership.** Two independent variables (generational cohort and biological sex) with two levels for the variable of biological sex (i.e., male and female) and three levels for the variable of generational cohort (i.e., Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennials) were tested to measure perceptions of followership as an essential element of leadership. Results indicate no significant main effect when examining generational cohort [ $F(2, 105) = 2.16, p = .12$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .04$ ] and biological sex [ $F(1, 105) = 1.31, p = .26$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ ]. The lack of main effect on generational cohort and biological sex resulted in no significant interaction [ $F(2, 105) = 1.20, p = .31$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ ].

**Emotional Intelligence.** Two independent variables (generational cohort and biological sex) with two levels for the variable of biological sex (i.e., male and female) and three levels for the variable of generational cohort (i.e., Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennials) were tested to measure perceptions of emotional intelligence as an essential element of leadership. Results indicate no significant main effect when examining generational cohort [ $F(2, 105) = .03, p = .97$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .001$ ] and biological sex [ $F(1, 105) = .10, p = .76$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ ]. The lack of main effect on generational cohort and biological sex resulted in no significant interaction [ $F(2, 105) = .36, p = .70$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ ].

**Ethical Behavior.** Two independent variables (generational cohort and biological sex) with two levels for the variable of biological sex (i.e., male and female) and three levels for the variable of generational cohort (i.e., Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennials) were tested to measure perceptions of ethical behavior as an essential element of leadership. Results indicate no significant main effect when examining biological sex [ $F(1, 105) = .48, p = .49$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ ]. However, there was a main effect when examining generational cohort [ $F(2, 105) = 3.58, p = .03$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .07$ ], indicating Baby Boomer participants ( $M=4.81$ ;  $N=43$ ) reported a higher level of agreement when viewing ethical behavior as an essential element of leadership when compared to Generation Xers ( $M=4.67$ ;  $N=32$ ) and Millennials ( $M=4.55$ ;  $N=30$ ). Although results do show there is a statistically significant main effect, the difference between generational cohort means are in close proximity of one another, suggesting the practical significance may be minimal. Finally, these main effects were not qualified by a significant interaction [ $F(2, 105) = 1.22, p = .30$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ ].

**Self-Awareness.** Two independent variables (generational cohort and biological sex) with two levels for the variable of biological sex (i.e., male and female) and three levels for the variable of generational cohort (i.e., Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennials) were tested to measure

perceptions of self-awareness as an essential element of leadership. Results indicate no significant main effect when examining generational cohort [ $F(2, 105) = 1.48, p = .23, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .03$ ] and biological sex [ $F(1, 105) = .05, p = .83, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .000$ ]. The lack of main effect on generational cohort and biological sex resulted in no significant interaction [ $F(2, 105) = .43, p = .65, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .01$ ].

## Discussion

Leadership is a highly contextual, multifaceted construct and is dependent on numerous situational factors (Arbinger Institute, 2010; Blanchard & Miller, 2009; Crawford et al., 2005; Kotter, 2012; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Northouse, 2010). While this study was exploratory in nature and is limited in generalizability, results nonetheless provide valuable insight for those employed in institutions of higher education. Results assist in framing how administrators in higher education are trained as related to follower interaction. Staff and administrators at all institutional levels interact with faculty on a regular basis and therefore need to understand how faculty perceive elements of effective leadership. This can include onboarding, professional development workshops and mentorship programs, specifically in the context of the essential elements of leadership.

A key finding of this study was that generational cohort and biological sex have an extraordinarily minor impact on faculty perceptions of the essential elements of leadership. This is counter to current literature, which generally deals only with perceptions of generations or biological sexes, or it supports differences in perceptions between both generations and biological sexes (Browne, 2021; Girard, 2010; Stevenson, 2020; Vezzosi, 2012). There is a gap in literature specifically related to how generational cohorts and biological sexes of university faculty perceive leadership. This study also addresses a gap in the literature that relates to faculty perceptions of specific elements of leadership in higher education contexts and converges around which elements of leadership are deemed essential. This research will assist in guiding those who wish to explore similar variables as it relates to leadership perceptions.

As stated, results of this study affirmed that while marginally significant differences existed between generational cohorts of faculty members, and the difference between biological sexes within generational cohorts, all perceived leadership in a comparable way. These results can provide institutional trainers, current leaders, and mentors within institutions with insight into the population they are teaching, training, and mentoring. The application of this knowledge can assist in the continued pursuit of institutional effectiveness.

The practices of the most successful leaders involve gaining an in-depth understanding of their followers (Howell & Costley, 2006). Information gained from this study can assist in the leadership education process in higher education contexts. Sharing the results of this study with the state regents or other institutional governing bodies could work to benefit all state and regional universities. The structure of the academic arm of institutions of higher education is in many cases similar. Faculty report to departmental chairs, deans, the provost, and then the president. These leaders can benefit from awareness of leadership elements faculty perceive as important.

## Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study contribute to the literature surrounding effective leadership of faculty. No single study can investigate all facets of this topic. As such, the following recommendations for future research are provided.

1. Further development and validation of the *Essential Elements of Leadership Survey* to improve reliability, including allowing for qualitative responses to provide more in-depth analysis of faculty perceptions.
2. Replication studies comparing results across various Carnegie Classification in order to compare faculty perceptions from different institutions.
3. Replication across additional demographic areas (e.g. staff/administrator, geography, discipline, and/or learning modalities).

## Conclusion

Higher education is experiencing massive shifts in a peri-COVID world, one of which includes the next generation of faculty members are beginning to emerge from terminal degree programs (Krishnamurthy, 2020). For leaders in contemporary higher education to thrive, understanding how followers perceive effective leadership today is as important as ever. Leadership is one of the most observed but least understood of all human behaviors and is contingent upon many situational factors (Burns, 1987; Fiedler, 1965). Generational cohort, biological sex, as well as education level, organizational context, and industry of employment all impact perceptions of leadership. Therefore, the results of this study must be considered within the context of the population studied.

Collectively, the three generations of faculty members studied asserted congruent perceptions, affirming the essential elements of leadership. In addition, there were minimal biological sex differences concerning perceptions of the essential elements of leadership. The population of this study represented a small contingent of the larger population of higher education faculty members. While the results of this study reflected similar perceptions about the importance of essential elements of leadership across generational cohorts and biological sexes, it is important that conclusions from the study be viewed within the context in which they were studied.

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