

Salla Karima

Millennial leadership in Great Place to Work companies in Finland



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UNIVERSITY OF LAPLAND

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**Millennial leadership in Great Place
to Work companies in Finland**

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Tutkimuksen tarkoitus oli luoda kuvaus millennialijohtajuudesta. Kasvatustieteiden tieteenalaan kuuluvassa tutkimuksessa tarkastelin monimenetelmällisesti suomalaisia millennialijohtajia kysyen, millaista johtajuus Great Place to Work in Finlandin yrityksissä on. Johtajuutta tarkasteltiin koko elämänkaaren kattavana kehitysprosessina hyödyntäen positiivisen psykologian teorioita. Syvennyin millennialijohtajuuteen kolmessa teemassa, jotka muodostivat artikkeliväitöskirjan osatutkimukset: johtajuuteen kasvaminen ja johtajana kehittyminen, johtajana menestyminen sekä johtajuuden haasteet ja niistä selviytyminen.

Teoreettinen viitekehys on moniulotteinen ja se koostuu johtajuuden ilmiön tarkastelusta, sen määritelmästä, tutkimuksellisista kehitysvaiheista sekä johtajuuden kehittymisen tutkimuksesta. Tutkimuksen taustalla on myös hyödynnetty positiiviseen johtajuuteen lukeutuvia johtajuustyyliä sekä menestyvää johtamista ja työhön sitoutumista erityisesti haasteista selviytymisen näkökulmasta.

Tutkimuksen lähestymistapana oli monimenetelmällinen laadullinen tutkimus. Aineisto perustui 28 millennialijohtajan teemahaastatteluun. Haastateltavat työskentelivät vuonna 2020 palkituissa Suomen parhaissa työpaikoissa ja haastatteluaineisto kerättiin kevään ja alkusyksyn 2020 aikana. Kussakin osatutkimuksessa aineistoa analysoitiin eri menetelmin: johtajien kasvua ja kehittymistä tarkasteltiin narratiivisella otteella, johtajien menestymistä puolestaan fenomenografisesti ja johtajien haasteita ja niistä selviytymistä tarkasteltiin laadullisen sisällönanalyysin keinoin.

Millennialijohtajien johtajuutta kuvastaa inhimillisuus, mikä ilmeni johtajien kokonaisvaltaisena ja ymmärtäväisenä asenteena ihmisyyttä ja johtajuutta kohtaan. Johtajien arvostus johtajuutta kohtaan ja jatkuvan kehittymisen ja oppimisen tavoite näyttäytyivät vahvasti. Tämä tutkimus osoitti, että johtoasemaan voi kasvaa ja kehittyä useita erilaisia polkuja pitkin, eikä tiettyä mallia voida määrittää. Johtajana menestymiselle oli monia yhteisiä piirteitä positiivisen johtajuuden teorioiden kanssa. Vahva usko oppimiseen ja kasvuun, itsetuntemukseen ja eettisesti kestävään

toimintaan oli ilmeistä johtajien puheissa ja johtajuutta kuvastivat inhimilliset arvot, ainutlaatuisuus, luovuus ja itsensä toteuttaminen. Johtajien kokemat haasteet olivat monipuolisia kattaen sekä toimintaympäristön ulkopuolelta tulevat haasteet että arjen haasteet. Optimistinen asenne, sinnikkyys sekä intohimo johtajan työtä kohtaan auttoi johtajia kohtaamaan haasteet ja selviytymään niistä.

Millenniaaleja johtajina on tutkittu vähän ja tutkimus antaa tuoreen näkökulman suomalaiseen millennialijohtajuuteen tarkastellessaan johtajuutta useasta eri näkökulmasta monimenetelmällisin keinoin. Tutkimus täydentää kasvatuksen, koulutuksen ja johtajuuden tutkimuksen kenttää, mikä mahdollistaa johtajuuden yhä laaja-alaisemman ymmärtämisen.

Avainsanat: johtajuus, millennialijohtajuus, positiiviset johtajuusteoriat, työhön sitoutuminen, monimenetelmäinen tutkimus, Great Place to Work yritykset

Abstract

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The purpose of the study was to create a description of millennial leadership. In a study that belongs to the discipline of educational sciences, I examined millennial Finnish leaders using a multi-method research approach, asking what millennial leadership is like in Great Place to Work companies of Finland. Leadership was examined as a development process covering the entire life cycle, utilizing the theories of positive psychology. I delved into millennial leadership through three themes based on which the publications of this article-based thesis were compiled: (1) growing into leadership and developing as a leader, (2) succeeding as a leader, and (3) leadership challenges and resources.

The theoretical reference framework is multidimensional and consists of an examination of the phenomenon of leadership, its definition, research development stages and research on the leader's development. In addition, the theory of leadership styles included viewpoints on positive and successful leadership.

The research approach was a multi-method qualitative study. The data was based on themed interviews of 28 millennial leaders. The interviewees worked in Great Place to Work companies in Finland that received the award in 2020, and the interview material was collected during the spring and early fall of 2020. The material was analyzed using different methods: the growth and development of leaders was examined with a narrative approach (Publication I), the success of leaders was examined with a phenomenographical approach (Publication II), and the challenges of leaders and their resources were examined with qualitative content analysis (Publication III).

The leadership of millennial leaders is reflected in humanity, which manifested as a comprehensive and understanding attitude towards humanity and leadership. The leaders' appreciation for leadership and the goal of continuous development and learning were strongly displayed. This study showed that there are many different paths to growth and development in leadership, and no specific pattern can be determined. Success as a leader shared many features with positive leadership

theories. A strong belief in learning and growth, self-awareness and ethically sustainable activities was evident in the leaders' speeches, and leadership was reflected in human values, uniqueness, creativity, and self-realization. The challenges experienced by the leaders were diverse, covering both challenges from outside the operating environment and everyday challenges. Optimistic attitude, perseverance and passion for their work helped leaders face and cope with challenges.

There has been little research on millennials as leaders, and this research provides a fresh perspective on Finnish millennial leadership by examining leadership from several different perspectives using multi-method methods. The research complements the field of education, training, and leadership research, which enables an increasingly comprehensive understanding of leadership.

Keywords: leadership, millennial leadership, positive leadership theories, engagement to work, multi-method research, Great Place to Work companies

Kiitokset

Väitöskirjan tekeminen on ollut pitkä ja monivaiheinen työ. Minua ovat tukeneet ja kannustaneet monet ihmiset, joita haluan nyt kiittää. Silmäni kostuvat, kun kirjoitan näitä sanoja. Voi kuinka paljosta olen niin monelle kiitollinen.

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List of Original Articles

The dissertation is based on the following original articles, which will be referred to in the text by their Roman numerals I–III

Articles I-III are reproduced with the kind permission of their copyright holders.

Publication I: Karima, S., Uusiautti, S., & Määttä, K. (2022). Millennial leaders' perceptions of leadership growth from great place to work finland companies. In S. Hyvärinen, T. Äärelä, & S. Uusiautti (Eds.), *Positive education and work: less struggling, more flourishing* (pp. 172-191). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Karima designed the study and collected and analyzed the research data. She wrote the first draft of the article. Uusiautti and Määttä participated in writing the article.

Publication II: Karima, S., Uusiautti, S., & Määttä, K. (2022). Defining the core of successful millennial leadership. *European Journal of Workplace Innovation*, 7(1), 109-131.

Karima planned the study together with Uusiautti and Määttä. Karima collected and analyzed the research material and wrote the first draft of the article. Uusiautti and Määttä offered support and advice with the analysis and participated in writing the article.

Publication III: Karima, S., Uusiautti, S., & Määttä, K. (2022). Internal burn to move on: millennial leaders' challenges and resources at work. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 10(1), 59-77.

Karima planned the study together with Uusiautti and Määttä. Karima collected and analyzed the research material and wrote the first draft of the article. Uusiautti and Määttä offered support and advice with the analysis and participated in writing the article.

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1 Introduction

Today's organizations are diverse; four, soon even five, generations work concurrently in the workforce (Lester et al., 2012; Lowe et al., 2020). The workforce is thus getting younger and older at the same time, and technology constantly brings new opportunities and demands as business becomes more complex (Ligon et al., 2008). All these aspects are reflected in the management of organizations and create both opportunities and challenges for leadership and management development (Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Uusiautti et al., 2012).

In working life during changes, focus is turned to those working in the position of a leader of people (Bauwens et al., 2022). The importance and meaning of leadership can be seen to be emphasized when thinking about organizations functionality, employee well-being and motivation, attitude, changes and crisis and relationship to one's work and its sustainability. Leadership research has been conducted in many different disciplines and there is still no single definition of leadership today (Hyvärinen, 2016; Northouse, 2013; Yukl, 2010). Leadership manifests itself in families, early childhood education, schools and places of study as well as in working life (Tackett et al., 2022). What do the leaders themselves think about leadership and what is associated with it? This study is based on the examination of leadership in working life and I am particularly interested in the phenomenon of millennial leadership.

Millennials play a central role in today's workplaces and in Finland, too, people in their 30–40s are the growing majority. In 2020, those born in Finland in 1983 were the largest birth cohort in the population (Statistics Finland, 2021). The spectrum of millennial studies is diverse, covering studies from different disciplines, which expresses the interest and need for understanding the thinking and behavior of this generation. With increased representation of the millennial generation in working life, research has been conducted, for example, on the expectations and values of millennials in working life (Ng et al., 2010; Kuron et al., 2015), work-life balance (Afif, 2019; Puspitasari & Darwin, 2021), millennials' expectations of their leaders (Peccianti, 2020), expectations towards leadership communication (Omilion-Hodges & Sugg, 2019) and reviews of how millennials could be better understood (Bannon et al., 2011). Deal et. al. (2010) stated that millennial studies are contradictory and not based on solid evidence. However, in their findings, they stated that there are a few topics, such as working attitudes, long-term health effects and personality factors, for which there is reasonably solid information about millennials' current, and likely future, behavior. In her research on occupational health, Martin (2020) highlights how important it is to turn the conversation to

how millennials should be led so that they can be prepared for the role of a leader. Yüceol et al. (2021) investigated the effect of remote work on the mental well-being of Generation Y academics in Turkey. Knowing that millennials comprise a large part of the working-age population, this research aims to complement this generation's thoughts on leadership, which has been researched quite scarcely, as described above. We can conclude that the perspective of millennial research is more about millennials' thoughts about leaders and working life in general rather than being listened to as leaders themselves.

Millennial leaders have started to replace previous generations in leadership positions in recent years (Grotkamp et al., 2020). There is not much previous research on the behavior and thoughts of millennials as leaders, although several studies have been conducted on, for example, the commitment of millennials, the expectations associated with leadership and what kind of leadership millennials value (Mayangdarastri & Khusna, 2020; Özcelik, 2015; Pinzaru et al., 2016; Putriastuti & Stasi, 2019; Valenti, 2019). Across previous studies, the millennial generation has been defined as those born in the years 1977-2009, for example, 1982-2002 (Sausser & Sims, 2013), 1981-2009 (Özcelik, 2015), 1980-2000 (Rudolph et al., 2018) or 1977-1988 (Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009). The terms "Generation Y" and "Gen Y" are also used for the millennial generation, but in this research, I use "millennials", which refers to the turn of the millennium when the majority of millennials became adults (Geoffrey, 2018). In this study, the millennial generation is considered those born in 1979-1991. This is considering the time spans of the various definitions presented above, emphasizing and limiting the research mainly to those born in the 1980s. The definition of a generation can vary between current generation theorists. This research uses the traditional interpretation, which defines a generational cohort as consisting of common years of birth, age, location, and common critical stages of development (Kupperschmidt, 2000).

The millennial generation has grown up during an era of technological growth and learned to utilize technology as part of learning and work (Harrison, 2017). With the development of technology, the millennial generation has with the rise of computers and the internet, and shared life experiences for them have been, for example, school shootings, 9/11 and the advent of social media (Lowe et al., 2020). Millennials have different expectations about the centrality of work in life; they value free time and flexibility, and they bring different personalities and attitudes to the workforce (Anderson et al., 2017, Kultalahti & Viitala, 2015). For millennials, well-being at work is important and they want to see clear career paths and career development opportunities (Mayangdarastri & Khusna, 2020). The expectations of managers are also different than in previous generations. Millennials value and benefit from a coaching leadership style, which is seen to correlate with their level of work engagement (Cates et al., 2013). Although differences have been observed between generations, it is still good to remember that they also have similarities (Lowe et al.,

2020), such as honesty (Sessa et al., 2007). Galdames and Guihen (2020) confirmed in their systematic literature review that there is not much empirical research on millennial leadership. In the general working life discussion, leadership has been identified as one of the cornerstones of success (see e.g., Cheung, 2015; Uusiautti, 2015; 2016b) and thus, it is important to supplement the field of leadership research with research focusing on millennial leadership.

This research focused on 28 millennial leaders of companies receiving the Great Place to Work Finland award in 2020. I examine millennial leadership multi-methodically, using narrative and phenomenographical approaches and content analysis in the analysis of the material. The research consists of three different international publications, the first of which focuses on the development path of leaders and related themes, the second publication on successful millennial leadership, and the third publication examines leaders' perceptions and thoughts about challenges and resources.

In this study, the concept of leadership is used, which refers to the management of people or "people leadership" and to which the interaction process between the leader and the employee is centrally connected (Alvesson, 2019; Collin et al., 2017). On the other hand, the management concept is often used in the literature for the management of affairs, which is seen as the management of structures, operations, rules, and operational processes (Collin et al., 2017; Yukl, 2010). In managing people, the focus is on the interaction between people and its social level, and the leader tries to influence the values, ideals, objects of enthusiasm, emotions, and identity of those being managed with their actions (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). In accordance with these definitions, the concept of leaders used in this research emphasizes the human side of leadership.

The research is in the field of educational sciences and aims to examine leadership from the perspective of growth as a person. A rapidly changing working life offers both challenges and opportunities for understanding the phenomenon of leadership – that is, a fascinating goal for educational research. For example, technological change and an aging and diverse working population bring changes to working life, and if workplace management and practices do not develop to meet the needs of a diversified working life, there is a threat of employees experiencing externality and injustice, possible conflicts, and job dissatisfaction (Kokkinen et al., 2020). Leaders play a crucial role in successful change processes because they act as an important part in carrying out the changes (Helming et al., 2019). In the field of education and teaching, one can see the need to understand the ways of leadership so that, for example, leadership training can be developed and better meet the needs of the future. The subject area of my research is new in the educational field, as the research produces an already little-studied perspective on millennial leadership, especially as described by the leaders themselves. This research thus produces new information in the fields of education, training, and leadership.

2 Theoretical Foundation of Leadership

The theoretical framework of the research is built around leadership in such a way that initially, in paragraph 2.1, I introduce the concept of leadership and how leadership has been studied and with what kind of emphasis leadership research has progressed. The interdisciplinary nature and diversity of leadership is well expressed by the understanding that there are numerous definitions of leadership, and its research field is vast. Since this study examines the growth of millennial leaders, a life cycle perspective has been chosen to examine leadership. Successful leadership is examined in chapter 2.2 with the help of positive psychology leadership theories, creating a picture of leadership theories with a human emphasis. Chapter 2.3 focuses on the theoretical examination of commitment to work, with an emphasis on examining commitment to work from the perspective of grit, which is well suited for analyzing work-related challenges and resources.

2.1 The Definition of Leadership and Leader Development

Systematic leadership studies started in the 1900s and the first focus was to study the traits associated with a leader. This approach did not bring any special trait or attribute which would have been typical for a leader or associated with an effective leadership. Hence, from 1940 onwards, leadership studies proceeded to focus on studying leaders' behaviors (Hyvärinen, 2016). The style approach emphasizes the behavior of the leader, and the aim of the studies were to find out how leaders combine the two behavior approaches, task and relationship, to lead subordinates to reach their targets (Northouse, 2013). During the 1960s, situational leadership approach studies started to increase, suggesting that different situations demand different kinds of leadership (Northouse, 2010). Leadership began to be seen as a process from the early 1980s and the focus shifted to approaches combining different theories (Kanste, 2005). According to Kanste (2005), the task of a leader was to give direction and purpose to the activity through goals and visions, and to highlight the profound significance of the activity.

Throughout its over-one-hundred-year-long history, leadership has been studied from many perspectives and disciplines, from trait theories with a more individual-centered perspective to a process-oriented perspective that looks at leadership in relation to the environment. What makes the definition of leadership particularly challenging is that there is not a single theoretical perspective on leadership,

but many theories that approach the phenomenon through different emphases and assumptions. Leadership research and evaluation can therefore be seen as interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary (Northouse, 2013; Yukl, 2010; Grunberg et al., 2019). Today, leadership theories describe leadership broadly, considering also followers, peers, supervisors, work setting, context, and culture together with the leader themselves (Benmira & Agboola, 2021; Avolio et al., 2009). Leadership theories always reflect the phenomena of their era and, according to Abrahamson (1996), the various marketers of leadership doctrines compete over which trends guide leadership development. Leaders seem to rely on management styles that appear to be more effective, predictable, and better than previous practices (Abrahamson, 1996).

Day and Harrison (2007) argue that leadership continues to evolve. In this study, this notion has been followed and leadership is seen as a process (Viitala, 2005; Northouse, 2013). In this process, the aim is to accomplish a collective target or group goal which is led by a leader influencing a group of people (Ashford & DeRue, 2012; Northouse, 2013). Day and Harrison (2007) take a broader understanding of leadership where leadership is seen as more than a single-leader perspective. In a traditional view, a leader takes charge of a team, directing it towards a common target. In this broader view, leadership can also take the form of team members working together collectively to set direction, build commitment, and create alignment. Even though there are many definitions of leadership, some key elements can be identified. In summary, leadership is a process that involves influence and manifests itself in groups and includes general goals (Northouse, 2013).

This led to the earlier expansion of leadership research to include the traits, attitudes and behaviors of leaders and their connection to the qualities of a good leader (Samul, 2020). Research related to the positive traits of leaders can be seen as one starting factor towards positive leadership theories. Over time, research expanded to focus on leaders' motivation, admiration, trust, commitment, and loyalty studies, which expanded the field of leadership research towards a more human nature (Wang & Thompson, 2006). Interaction, social and emotional skills, and the ability to consider employees as individuals are emphasized in today's leadership theories (Benmira & Agboola, 2021).

As with leadership in general, leader development can also be viewed in multiple ways. Common definitions of leader development typically focus on what helps one become more effective in a leadership role. One perspective of leader development is to understand it as a process across a lifespan (Day, 2000; 2011; Day et al., 2009; Ligon et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2021). By this, development already starts in the early years before an individual starts formal schooling and continues even post retirement (Hyvärinen et al., 2018; 2017). The whole lifecycle approach was chosen as the way to examine leader development in this study, as it offers a comprehensive

framework and the development of successful leaders requires an understanding of the antecedents, processes, and results of effective leader development (Liu et al., 2021).

Murphy and Johnson's (2011) three-stage leader development life cycle model considers the dynamic and iterative processes involved in leadership development. In the first step, the model focuses on the factors of an individual's early development which are divided into three categories: genetics, parenting styles, and early learning experiences, such as from sports or educational activities. In the second phase, these factors and experiences during childhood and adolescence are considered to form the basis for individuals' leadership identity and self-regulation. In the third stage, and as a result, leadership experiences in adulthood further influence leadership development and leadership effectiveness (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). The advantage of the model is that it also considers contextual factors, i.e., human development stages, societal expectations, and time in history, all of which have an impact on leadership development (Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Hyvärinen, 2016).

Liu et al. (2021), on the other hand, have developed a model according to which leaders develop through life experiences, paying attention to the nature and results of these experiences (see also Uusiautti et al., 2012). The model is based on the idea that an individual has the potential to develop as a leader at every stage of life and every individual can develop leadership in everyday life. (Liu et al., 2021). Leader development contexts are seen to vary throughout lifecycles (Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Liu et al., 2021). For example, in preschool, childhood and adolescence, the child's family system serves as the main context for leader development, and in middle and late adulthood, a leader's current family system increasingly serves as the main context (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). In general, education systems start to play a bigger role and different organizational systems start to act as an important and increasing context in adolescence and early adulthood. It is also important to note that an individual always belongs to a certain social and cultural context (Liu et al., 2021), which can be seen to have an impact on developing as a leader.

In this study, I follow the interpretation of Grunberg et al. (2019) who link leadership to a social, psychological process. As a basis for this, they have utilized Day's (2011) definition in which "leader" is human capital and internal knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes and motivation, and "leadership" is social capital, meaning interpersonal relationships and organizational culture. In this study, leadership refers to a socially constructed influencing process that includes common goals and is manifested in groups, using Northouse's (2013) and Grunberg's et al. (2019) definitions.

2.2 Positive Leadership Theories as the Basis of Successful Leadership

As mentioned in the previous section, leadership research has begun to focus on the impact of humanity. This is partly based on the increasing research within positive psychology on the idea of positive leadership. Positive leadership can be seen as an umbrella concept for leadership theories that focus on how the leader can promote the optimal well-being of individuals and communities as well as their own (Gauthier, 2015; Youssef & Luthans, 2012). Work and organizational psychologists began to focus more on well-being and supporting positive employee development through the perspective of positive psychology. It can be seen that the focus of leadership discussion and research has shifted from an explanatory to understanding perspective.

Despite the interest in positive leadership, definitions and measurements of it vary (Antino et al, 2014; Blanch et al., 2016; Malinga et al., 2019). In addition, there have been criticisms of positive psychology's underlying assumptions, alleged methodological and conceptual problems, and lack of scientific validity (Lazarus, 2003; Malinga et al., 2019; Miller, 2008). On the other hand, studies have shown that positive psychology can be considered as one branch of psychological research, which can be seen as fulfilling the entire field of psychological research (e.g., Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It has been also questioned whether the positives and negatives should even be juxtaposed since positivity and negativity have special characteristics. For example, positive and negative attitudes and emotions can co-exist, and the lack of nausea does not automatically lead to feeling good or flourishing (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2013). For this reason, among other things, it is important to study phenomena such as leadership with the help of a positive outlook so that we can highlight related issues and thus complete the entire field of leadership research.

Leadership theories of positive leadership are united by the idea of focusing on what works and produces good results. Leadership styles are united by a strong awareness of self, values, thoughts, and feelings (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). A positive leadership style focuses on identifying and supporting people's strengths and abilities and can be seen as connected to humanistic values. Operations are guided by a positive attitude and leadership is seen as a continuous, dynamic process (Blanch et al., 2016; Dinh et al., 2014).

Positive leadership theories are united by their closeness to people and its various aspects can be examined from the perspective of five leadership theories, which are Transformational (Bass, 1985), Authentic (Avolio & Gardner, 2005), Servant (Greenleaf, 1997), Spiritual (Fry, 2003) and Ethical (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Several similarities can be found in the theories, although the scientific strengths of their theoretical orientations vary. I will now take a closer look at the differences and similarities between these theories.

The theory of transformational leadership has been developed from an analysis of the characteristics of political leaders (Burns, 1978), which emphasizes personal, intrinsically motivated leadership. Bass (1999) refined Burns' model and divided transformational leadership into four different parts: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration of employees (Bass, 1985). The element supporting people's growth and learning was later also included (Bass, 2000) and transformational leadership can be described as encouraging, coaching, inspiring and self-challenging. The management style focuses on supporting strengths and developing them. Transformational leadership and corporate culture have been found to have positive and significant effects on work performance, both directly and indirectly, through innovative work behavior (Purwanto et al., 2020). A transformative leadership style has also been found to have a positive connection with innovative work behavior (Purwanto et al., 2020). Successful transformational leadership can be thus defined as when the leader inspires, encourages, and trusts her or his team towards common goals.

According to the theory of authentic leadership, leaders act genuinely in accordance with their beliefs and values and lead by example. Leaders are aware of their own thoughts and their behavior as well as the values, moral perspectives, knowledge, and strengths of others (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). The leader is honest to his own thoughts and his actions are strongly guided by ethical behavior both towards himself and others (Blanch et al., 2016). It has been found that there is a positive relationship between authentic leadership and supervisor evaluations, as well as that an authentic leadership style increases attachment and employee satisfaction, which continues strengthening a positive identity (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Novitasari et al. (2020) state that an authentic leadership style motivates employees and thus creates positive situations in working communities. These perspectives can be seen as part of successful authentic leadership and successful authentic leadership can be defined as when the leader acts based on her or his own values, is honest with themselves and acts ethically correctly.

Serving and ethical leadership styles are reminiscent of an authentic leadership style (Pälli, 2016). According to the definition created by Greenleaf (1997), a serving leader prioritizes service over the common good and puts the needs, aspirations, and interests of followers before their own (see also Blanch et al., 2016). In their systematic literature review, Coetzer et. al. (2017) found that servant leadership styles are defined by eight characteristics: authenticity, humility, compassion, responsibility, courage, altruism, honesty, and listening. Ethical leadership is a broad entity in which actions in accordance with one's own ethical principles are emphasized. The leader embodies the culture of doing the right thing in everything they do and tries to influence the employees with their own behavior and actions. The aforementioned leadership trends have a lot in common with ethical leadership, and efforts have been made to create our own theory of ethical leadership (Blanch et

al., 2016). Transformative, spiritual, and authentic theories of leadership all include the moral potential of leadership in some way (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Ethical and serving leadership has been found to have positive effects on the organization's operations. For example, studies have found that ethical leadership promotes ethical behavior and positively influences employees' own ethical behavior (Monahan, 2012), which leads to increased job satisfaction and strengthens trust in leaders (Yozgat & Meşekiran, 2016). Servant leadership, on the other hand, has been found to have positive effects on employee engagement (Tang et al., 2016) and confidence in one's own abilities (Walumbwa et al., 2010).

Spiritual leadership theory has many ethical aspects and is closely aligned with ethical leadership (Wang et al., 2019). The goal of spiritual leadership is to create an environment where the leader and subordinates can become intrinsically motivated by the leader's values, attitudes, and behavior. Successful spiritual leadership thus appears as intrinsic motivation that leads to better learning, creativity, and performance (Wang et al., 2019).

The leadership viewpoints that combine leadership with success have also been approached on the topic. For example, Syväjärvi and Pietiläinen (2016) defined the principles of humane and efficient leadership. Uusiautti's definitions of success are more focused on a strengths-based approach and the sense of meaningfulness at work, where personal features together with teamwork and leadership matter (see e.g., Karima & Uusiautti, 2018; Uusiautti, 2016a; 2016b) and can even predict sustainable success and flourishing (Uusiautti & Hyvärinen, 2020). It also contains the ideas of caring leadership (see Syväjärvi et al., 2014; Uusiautti, 2013; Uusiautti et al., 2012).

People-centeredness strongly connects the aforementioned five positive leadership theories. Table 1 summarizes the key points of these theories and aims to show that there are similarities between the theories even if their emphasis differs. Emphasizing people-centeredness in leadership practices has led to examining well-being at work with the help of positive perspectives, where, for example, engagement to work has been seen to increase the personal success of organizations and people.

Table 1. Summary of positive leadership theories

Leadership theory	Developer	Focus in leadership	Features related to positive leadership
Transformational	Burns, 1978, Bass, 1985 & Bass, 2000	Encouraging, coaching, inspiring and self-challenging	Supporting strengths and their development
Authentic	Avolio & Gardner, 2005	Leading with values and principles, awareness of one's thoughts and feelings	Genuine, heartfelt, and ethical action
Servant	Greenleaf, 1997	Subordinates are at the center of the activity, not so much the leader	Empowerment and accountability of subordinates
Ethical	Brown & Treviño, 2006	The leader's actions are guided by their own ethical principles	Fair, respectful and trusting action
Spiritual	Fry, 2003	The leader's internal motivation with their values, attitude, and behavior	Knowing yourself and being aware of what your own actions are like

2.3 Work Engagement as the Resource of Successful Leadership

The previous chapters have focused on the definition and theories of positive leadership and leader development. Successful leadership has resulted in as many favorable outcomes in the work community and for organizations. In order to be a successful leader, work engagement can be distinguished as one of the main resources for supporting the leader's optimal function in leadership tasks.

Work engagement can be defined as "a positive, satisfying, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and ownership" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). An employee who enjoys doing work takes pride in their work and is committed and perseverant even in difficult times. Commitment to work can be examined in different dimensions, the first of which, vigor, is the experience of energy, the desire to invest in work, as well as perseverance and the desire to overcome challenges. Dedication, on the other hand, is the experience of meaning, enthusiasm, inspiration and pride in work. The third dimension, absorption, reflects deep concentration and dedication to work. It can seem difficult to break away from work in a submerged state. Work engagement is defined as a fairly permanent state not focused on any specific object, event, individual, or behavior. Commitment to work is reflected as a positive state of mind related to work (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

The level of employee engagement is seen to be positively related to the performance of the business unit, i.e., customer satisfaction and loyalty, profitability, productivity, turnover, and safety (Harter et al., 2002). Schaufeli et al. (2001) found that positively engaged employees were less obsessive about

work, even though they were motivated to work long hours. Instead, positive commitment can lead to success and success at work (e.g., Karima & Uusiautti, 2018; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2016).

When it comes to leaders' engagement at work, it has been found that leaders have a positive effect on work engagement, for example by changing the working conditions of those being managed and by directly inspiring, uniting, and strengthening their employees (Schaufeli, 2015). Longitudinal studies have linked several positive leadership styles to employee engagement (Biggs et al., 2014 & Mehmood et al., 2016). Chughtai et al. (2014) investigated the role of trust in managerial work from the perspective of combining ethical management with employee well-being and found that trust in leaders fully mediated the effects of ethical leadership on work engagement and emotional exhaustion. In his study, Fletcher (2016) stated that a good supervisor-subordinate relationship has positive effects on work engagement. Gameda and Lee (2020), on the other hand, showed in their study that a transformational leadership style had a significant positive relationship with employees' work engagement and innovative work behavior, and that work engagement had significant positive relationships with the indicators of work outcomes. In parallel, Pillai's and Williams' (2004) research showed that transformational leadership increases confidence.

Engagement in work can also be viewed from the perspective of grit because it shares associated components. Duckworth et al. (2007) created the term "grit," which is defined as persistence and passion toward long-term goals. Gritty employees are motivated to achieve their goals persistently and their strength is endurance. Gritty individuals work harder than their counterparts and remain most engaged in the task at hand for longer (Duckworth et al., 2009). Although genetic factors play a role, it is not immutable. Like other traits, it varies based on environmental factors (Park et al., 2020). So, it can be said that grit is both a character trait and a skill (Duckworth, 2016).

Grit contains four different components, the first of which is interest (Duckworth, 2016). Interest can be said to be the starting point of everything because it activates passionate action and produces pleasure. Exercise is seen as another component, and it has been found that persistent people spend more time on exercise. Development therefore requires long-term dedication, but also, above all, high-quality education and a growth mindset (Duckworth, 2016). The third component is purpose, according to which, doing something with a purpose is perceived as meaningful and develops passion (Duckworth, 2016). The relevance of self-realization usually develops with passion and practice, but it can also develop earlier. Furthermore, persistent people are motivated when they feel that their efforts matter to other people as well (Duckworth, 2016). The last component of grit is hope, which is also an integral part of all the above components. Belief in achievement and the ability to overcome difficulties are necessary to maintain persistence (Duckworth, 2016).

Grit provides an interesting and new perspective for analyzing millennial leaders' work-related challenges and resources. For example, Schimschal and Lomas (2018) investigated the relationship between a leader's ability and the ability to implement positive leadership strategies and practices and found that leaders' persistence showed a stronger relationship than passion and that grit was positively correlated with positive leadership. Caza and Posner's (2018) study examined the impact of grit on leaders' own behavior as role models and innovators, as well as on inspiring, empowering and supporting followers. Persistent leaders were more likely to report role model and innovative behaviors, but less likely to report inspirational behaviors, which were found to be context related.

Southwick et. al. (2020) state in their review that an authoritative leadership style encourages passion and perseverance, where the authoritarian way refers to both supportive and demanding leadership at the same time. For their part, they state that transformational leadership inspires passion while setting challenging goals and encouraging perseverance. Leaders must be demanding to encourage their subordinates to persevere to achieve long-term goals (Southwick et al., 2020.) In their studies, Eskreis-Winkler et al. (2014a,b) and Singh and Chopra (2018) have found a positive connection between grit and engagement with work which encourages examining work engagement from the perspective of grit.

In summary, the perspective taken in this research is based on the understanding that millennial leadership can be viewed from the perspectives of leader development and the nature of leadership. Leader development in my research is divided into analyses of growth as a leader and successful leadership. Leader development is therefore considered an upper concept, while the growth as a leader is seen here as the leader's personal growth narrative. Success in leadership emerges along with leader development and can also be perceived differently by different leaders. The nature of leadership refers to the daily leadership work that a leader faces. A leader meets certain challenges but also possess resources that can be analyzed through the concept of work engagement.

3 Research Aims and Questions

The aim of this research is to describe millennial leadership: what it is, how to develop into it, how to succeed and what its challenges and resources are. The research is based on the thoughts, perceptions, and experiences of millennial leaders themselves in Great Place to Work companies in Finland.

The main research question:

What is millennial leadership like in a 'Great Place to Work' in Finland?

The study consists of three publications:

Publication I

The aim of the first publication is to understand millennial leadership and growth as a leader. The following sub-questions were set for the publication:

- How do millennial leaders describe their growth as leaders?
- What factors support the development of a leader?

Publication II

The aim of the second publication is to explore how millennial leaders describe themselves as leaders. The following sub-question was set for the publication:

- How do 'Great Place to Work' leaders perceive successful millennial leadership?

Publication III

The aim of the third publication is to analyze what kind of challenges millennial leaders face in their work, the elements of passion and what their main resources are. The following sub-questions were set for the publication:

- What kind of challenges do millennial leaders describe?
- What kind of resources do they identify when dealing with these challenges?

4 Methods

4.1 Worldview in This Research

Like any research, this is also based on a basic image or assumption about the world as a guide. I refer here to a worldview that guided my research choices (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A paradigm can be thought of as a way of thinking or a trend in a scientific field, and the chosen paradigm represents the researcher's worldview – how the world is seen. My research is based on the socio-constructivist world view, the basis of which is that people strive to understand by constructing, i.e., by their own perception of the world in which they live and work and give meaning to what they see and experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Ontology refers to the study of the nature of existence, what the essence of reality is like and what we can know about it. In this research, reality is determined in the interaction between me as the researcher and the researched, i.e., in a concrete interview situation. Reality is formed in different ways for different people depending, among other things, on previous perceptions and life experiences. As a researcher, my reality is fundamentally different from that of the research participants, but as this research was based on interaction between us, together we created a common reality. This means that reality is produced by communicating through language (Cuba & Lincoln, 2000; Metsämuuronen 2006). Epistemology, on the other hand, means learning about knowledge and its essence – what kind of relationship the researcher and the researched have and what can be known in general. In my research, the relationship between the researcher and the researched is intersubjective rather than an objective relationship of knowledge formation. As a researcher, I moved into the leaders' social environment by conducting an interview in which I was part of the reality I was researching, i.e., millennial leadership. Thus, I created the information together with the interviewees and it overlaps with the social context, language structures and conversation of the community being studied. The formation of knowledge is seen as a social process, and there are several realities because people construct the same phenomenon subjectively (Cuba & Lincoln, 2000; Metsämuuronen 2006).

My research is constructivist in nature, which is a scientific philosophical trend where knowledge is seen to be formed during the research process. Scientific knowledge was thus constructed by me as a researcher and in the world of constructivism, there is no pre-existing knowledge or truth. According to the view, there are different subjective meanings and views, and with the help of the research,

my aim is to bring these to the fore rather than reduce these views to strict categories. As such, the task of myself as a researcher is to bring out an interpretation of the worldview of the researched (Creswell, 2014, 8). According to Mann and MacLeod (2015), the term 'constructivism' has several meanings, and a commonality is the creation of meanings collectively and socially.

I used qualitative research methods, as it is typical for a constructivist research approach. The process of qualitative research is inductive in nature, which is opposite to a positivist view where one typically starts with an existing theory. The goal of qualitative research based on a constructivist worldview is to inductively produce a theory or create meanings (Creswell, 2014). Burr (1998) talks about social constructivism, stating emphatically that there is no single correct definition for it, but different definitions have many common factors. Information that is considered self-evident is typically treated critically, and all understanding is context-bound.

With this research being qualitative, the goal is to create a description of GPTW (Great Place to Work) millennial leadership. The purpose is to bring out the research participants' views and meaningful experiences. To be able to describe these, there was a need to understand and hear the leaders' experiences and perspectives on leadership. Research in a real environment, the acquisition of information through interviews and the researcher's key role in research work were realized in this study, which corresponds to the key features of qualitative research. The flexibility of the research process was such that, for example, in interview situations, depending on the topic and the situation, the researcher asked supplemental non-predetermined questions. The final form of the research was therefore created during the research process, which is typical in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014).

Qualitative research is personal in nature because the researcher is the research tool (Patton, 2015; Creswell, 2014). For example, the researcher's own background, expertise, views, and worldview influence the kind of research. According to Patton (2015), contextual sensitivity is central in qualitative research and is essential for the researcher to bring out the views and meanings of the researched, not so much the researcher's own views (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the aim is to describe and open the world surrounding the research participants to the reader so that the contextuality of the research participants and the entire study becomes apparent.

When researching the path and the development of leaders in Publication I, the narrative approach was well suited because I was interested in the leaders' stories about leadership. The subjects of the research were therefore the narratives of the leaders. Narrative research is part of qualitative research methods and earlier I stated that the contextuality of qualitative research is an essential part of the research method. It manifests itself in the narrative approach in such a way that the narratives remain in a certain context. Bruner (1987) has also stated that life is not as it was, but is interpreted, reinterpreted, told, and retold. Storytelling and

interpretation are also influenced by situation and culture. The result is a unified entity where the form and structure of the narrative hold the content together and structures the units of the story such as orientation, complexity, resolution, and closure (Bamberg, 2012).

Phenomenography, on the other hand, focuses on studying the world of people's experiences and how people perceive reality based on them. In wanting to understand the leaders' different experiences of successful leadership in Publication II, phenomenological approach methods were well suited. The idea behind phenomenographical research is basically people's different experiences and understanding of phenomena, although interrelated ways can often be found (Bruce, 1997; Marton, 1986). In particular, the qualitative differences in people's perceptions and thoughts are at the core of phenomenographical research, not so much their quantitative emphasis, and how different perceptions are formed and what their nature is (Marton, 1981, Given, 2008; Huusko & Paloniemi, 2006). Sin (2010) presents the phenomenographical approach as the background idea of the assumption that people's perceptions are always relative, which leads to people's perceptions of some things, events and experiences being different. Huusko and Paloniemi (2006) complement this well by stating that in phenomenography, perceptions are understood as processes of giving meaning and they are given a deeper and broader meaning than opinion. Then in Publication III, the qualitative approach and qualitative content analysis (Elo et al., 2014) provide a more thematic viewpoint to leadership challenges and resources.

Table 2 visualizes the research questions, articles, methods, data, and analysis of each publication.

Table 2. Summary of publications

Publication	Article name and publication channel:	Research questions	Method and Data	Analysis
Publication I	What kind of journey is there to become a leader? Millennial leader perceptions of leadership growth in Great Place to Work companies. Published: Hyvärinen, S., Äärelä, T., & Uusiautti, S. (Eds.) (2022) Positive Education and Work: Less Struggling, More Flourishing. University of Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.	How do millennial leaders describe their growth as leaders? What factors support the development of a leader?	Method: Narrative Data: Semi-structured thematic interviews	Holistic approach to a narrative analysis
Publication II	Defining the core of successful millennial leadership. Published: Karima, S., Uusiautti, S., & Määttä, K. (2022) European Journal of Workplace Innovation 7(1).	How do Great Place to Work leaders perceive successful millennial leadership?	Method: Phenomenographical Data: Semi-structured thematic interviews	Four stage model of phenomenographical analysis
Publication III	Internal burn to move on - Millennial leaders' challenges and coping. Published: Karima, S., Uusiautti, S., & Määttä, K. (2022) International Journal of Business and Management 10(1).	What kind of challenges do millennial leaders describe? What kind of resources do they identify when dealing with these challenges?	Method: Content analysis Data: Semi-structured thematic interview	Conventional approach – also known as data-driven content analysis

4.2 Research Participants and Data Collection

4.2.1 An Overview of 'Great Place to Work' Companies

The aim of this research was to create as broad a picture of millennial leadership as possible. As described in the theory section, a particular focus was on the positive leader development and nature of leadership. Thus, the research participants were recruited from companies involved with the GPTW certification in Finland.

Great Place to Work (GPTW) is a private global consultation company who markets itself as an expert in corporate culture, offering personnel surveys and the GPTW certification on good corporate culture. In their products, they offer,

among other things, global measurement tools through their Trust Index survey and in addition evaluate organizations' cultures through the Culture Audit program (Great Place to Work, 2022a). The company does research in 97 countries, has 10,000 organizations researched annually and all together, these companies have over 10 million employees (Great Place to Work, 2022b). GPTW is a versatile and rich research target because companies of different sizes and from different fields participate in it, such as accounting firms, agricultural machinery import and sale companies, staffing and recruitment companies and digital service providers. With this selection, aim was to reach millennial leaders from different areas.

GPTW began operating in Finland twenty years ago (Great Place to Work, 2022c). In this study, data was collected for the GPTW companies that were successful in Finland in 2020. In its ranking, GPTW divides companies into three categories based on the company's total number of employees: small (20-49 employees), middle-sized (50-488 employees) and large companies (500+ employees). The information of the fifty most successful companies is published on the GPTW website.

This research was not done for GPTW, but the leaders of GPTW serve as an interesting target group as they can be considered to work in companies that invest in a good corporate culture and develop their operations with the help of GPTW. The personnel measurements offered by GPTW can be considered to support leaders in their work, and the continuous development of the working community can be considered to enable a favorable growth environment for leaders, also personally.

4.2.2 Millennial leaders as research participants

The research data was collected via thematic interviews with 28 Finnish leaders who work in Great Place to Work (GPTW) companies. In scientific research, it is of the utmost importance in terms of validity and reliability to open the nature and selection of the research participants. There would have been many opportunities to select interviewed leaders from different sectors and business fields but, for this study, it was decided to concentrate on the companies who succeeded in the GPTW scheme during 2020 precisely because of the companies of different sizes and different sectors.

Data collection started during February-March 2020 by contacting a total of 50 (7 big, 30 middle-sized and 13 small) companies via either the company's Human Resource (HR) manager or a person working in a similar position by email. The email contained a summary of the research targets and a survey of willingness to participate in the study. Aside from the year of birth and position of the leader, the HR representative or similar was not given any other selection criteria but had full freedom to choose whose contact information they would provide for the study. No contact information could be found for three companies based on the GPTW websites, and thus it was decided to leave them out of this study, leaving 47 companies (Great Place to Work, 2020b).

After contact, a total of 11 companies were willing to participate in this study and their HR unit provided the contact information of the millennial leaders. These 40 leaders were also contacted by e-mail and 28 were willing to participate in the interview. Some of the contacted leaders refused to participate in the study, citing scheduling challenges or a heavy workload. Eventually, 15 men and 13 women were interviewed, from which 19 were born between the years 1978-1985 and nine (9) between 1986-1991. Most of the study participants were from the early millennial generation, a few born in the late 1970s. Millennial leaders' educational backgrounds were distributed as follows: three (3) had doctoral degree, 15 had a master's degree education including university and university of applied sciences level degrees, one (1) had a candidate degree, three (3) had polytechnic degrees and six (6) had a vocational level degree, from which two of these had double degrees.

4.2.3 Interview Method and Data Collection

A semi-structured thematic interview was selected as the method of data collection for this study due to its versatility and flexibility (Kallio et al., 2016). Galletta (2012) also emphasizes that the semi-structured interview method enables reciprocity between the interviewer and the participant, which I had positive previous experience with as a researcher for thesis work at a university of applied sciences and graduate work at a university.

In semi-structured themed interviews, the main topics of the interview are decided in advance, but the interview itself is conversational in nature and the interviewer can ask additional questions as the conversation progresses (Wengraf, 2001; Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). Participants can answer questions in the way and to the extent they want (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). A semi-structured theme interview is therefore characterized by its flexibility and pre-defined themes do not necessarily need to be asked of all interviewees in the same order.

The interview framework consisted of six different themes being: 1) introduction of study and interviewee, 2) warming up, 3) characteristics of leadership and leadership experiences, 4) leadership motivation and enthusiasm, 5) leadership challenges and how to cope with them and 6) summary and ending the interview (Appendices 1-4).

I structured the order of the interview themes in such a way that it naturally progressed from the beginning of the leader's career towards the present day. I wanted the themes to be clear entities of their own so that the leaders' experiences could be seen as diversely as possible and thus, create a comprehensive picture of millennial leadership.

As the first actual interview theme, I had defined the nature of leadership work and leadership experiences, where I was interested in hearing about the interviewee's journey to becoming a leader and what kind of thoughts leadership entails. By asking about the journey to becoming a leader, I was looking for a narrative description,

that is, in practice, the leader's entire story of how they became a leader. In addition, the purpose was to discuss the successes and failures experienced by the interviewees. Characteristic of the phenomenographical approach, I wanted to know the leaders' different perceptions of successes and failures, which is why I asked the leaders to talk freely about their experiences. The second theme focused on observing motivation and enthusiasm, and I was interested in hearing what gets the interviewees excited and what motivates, and accordingly doesn't motivate, them. The last theme focused on the challenges of leadership and especially how the interviewees have coped with them. Additionally, in these themes, I encouraged the leaders to describe their own perceptions and experiences.

The actual interviews proceeded in the following manner. At the beginning of the interview, as a researcher, I briefly presented the goals of the study, after which I moved on to warm-up questions related to the interviewee's background such as gender, age, education, total years of work and a description of their current position. It felt natural for me to start the interview by introducing myself and the research, after which the interviewee could talk freely about him- or herself. I believed this would create a good basis and atmosphere for the interview.

After this, the interview progressed to a discussion about the characteristics of leadership and leadership experiences. I asked the leaders to talk freely about their journey to becoming a leader.

It is important for the interviewer to listen carefully to the interviewee's narrative and find points that need clarification or supplementation from the point of view of the research (Galletta 2012, 77). I noticed that this skill developed as the interviews progressed, and especially in the middle of the interviews, I noticed that I delved into the themes better and thus also formed natural, clarifying questions. Galletta (2012, 119) emphasizes that analysis of the material goes hand in hand already in the collection phase, and thus I tried to write down, for example, all my observations during the interviews. Considerations like this were the physical enthusiasm of the interviewees, which could be seen on video when they talked about their journey to becoming a leader. Even when talking about their own failures, the interviewees' expressions became very thoughtful, and they clearly strive to reflect on their own actions in depth.

All interviews were conducted between March 2020 and August 2020. Participants were given the freedom to choose how and when the interview would take place. The first interview was done face-to-face, but the rest took place remotely by utilizing Microsoft Teams meeting function, mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic as remote working was highly recommended in Finland. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewee and when writing the transcripts, identifying details were encrypted to ensure confidentiality (Flick, 2014).

I recorded one face-to-face interview with a phone and the other interviews were recorded using Microsoft Teams. Interview material was collected from 28

interviews lasting around 26 hours, 322 pages in the form of transcripts, with 1 line spacing. In addition, after the interviews, I wrote a research diary in which I listed my observations, thoughts, and feelings. Like Galletta (2012) encourages, I did this consciously and on purpose so that I could return to my observations at a later stage of the analysis.

Most of the leaders noted at the end of the interview that they liked the questions, and some also mentioned that the discussion was good for self-reflection. In the interviews, most of the questions were formulated in the “how” or “what” type, in accordance with the recommendations of Holstein and Gubrium (2016) and Silvermann (2017), and this kind of questioning also enabled the interviewees to self-reflect.

4.3 Data Analyses

4.3.1 Publication I – Narrative Analysis

The approach of the first publication was narrative in nature. Narrative is characterized by the generation of knowledge from stories and meanings and its purpose is to describe and clarify human experiences (Polkinghorne, 2005). According to Lieblich et al. (1998), narrative research can refer to any research that uses narrative materials. The transcribed interview materials serve as the material in this study. Narrative-ness is characterized by its narrative nature and, according to Bamberg (2012), narratives are built through series of events that take place in a certain time and place. According to Polkinghorne (2005), narrative is a process in which the narrator gathers the various events and activities of their life into a thematic entity. The nature of narrative research is to create a thematically and logically progressing story about individual events (Salmela & Uusiautti, 2017). Precisely because of this process nature, narrative was well suited as a methodology for the first publication, as it sought to highlight the growth of millennial leaders to leadership.

The first goal of the research interviews was to hear leadership stories and focus on understanding the interviewee’s journey and growth as a leader. Another aim was to hear and understand evidence of leadership experiences and their meanings (Polkinghorne, 2005).

In narrative research, there are various possibilities for reading, interpreting, and analyzing interview material. Lieblich et al. (1998) present two dimensions: a) holistic vs. categorical approach and b) content vs. form approach. In this publication, the target was to focus on understanding how millennial leaders describe their growth as a leader and which factors support their development as a leader. It is therefore essential to analyze entire stories, and for this reason, a holistic approach was chosen. De Fina (2020) also states that today, narrative analysis has moved from the study of narratives, per se, towards a method where storytelling is analyzed as a

process. Consideration of context sensitivity (De Fina, 2020) has also been the focus of this analysis. Lieblich et al. (1998) notes in this approach, turning points in the stories are sought, which sheds light on the whole development. The material was analyzed for the entire life cycle of the leaders, which was natural because the leaders' narratives progressed naturally, starting with the events of childhood or youth, moving to school and working life. Most of the leaders started their narratives with childhood experiences, for example, thinking about hobbies and school success, which they saw as part of developing into a leader. Polkinghorne (1995) has stated that a story being produced in narrative is not a narration, but a story is a set of events and activities organized by a plot. This was manifested in the interviews, as a clear plot structure emerged in the description of the leaders' journeys. It started in most of the interviews with childhood experiences, moving on to reflect on school and working life.

In accordance with the nature of narrative research, the analysis of the material began by listening to the interviews and going through the transcribed material. When I listened to the interviews in their entirety, I gained good understanding of the leaders' stories, which was complemented by the interview diary I kept during the interviews. The nature of the leaders' interviews is well described by their positivity and willingness to talk about their experiences. However, in this context, it is good to be aware of Salmela's and Uusiautti's (2017) observation that the stories could have been different if shared among friends, for example, rather than with the researcher. I classified the stories in the material according to temporal organization, in the spirit of narrative research. The interview structure I formed before the interviews progressed in chronological order, so that first I gave the interviewees the freedom to talk about their journey to becoming a leader in their own words. After that, I asked more detailed questions, but most started describing their growth as leaders by talking about their childhood and youth. The structure of the interview therefore facilitated classification in the analysis phase.

My analysis was based on collected data sources, i.e. I did not form meanings in advance based on, for example, any theory. Polkinghorne (1995) divides the analysis of material into two main groups: the analysis of narratives, and narrative analysis. Since this study looked at the whole material, the analysis is, by nature, an analysis of narratives. The analysis continued by classifying the stories using themes corresponding to the research questions. I completed the analysis of Polkinghorne's (1995) narratives by examining the material from Lieblich et al.'s (1998) holistic vs. categorical and substantive vs. formal with the help of distribution. Since the goal of the first publication was to understand how leaders describe their journey to becoming leaders and which factors have supported their development, it was natural to choose a holistic approach. This holistic-form approach was chosen as whole stories were analyzed. In this approach, turning points from the stories were especially noted, which *sheds light on the entire development* as Lieblich et al.

(1998) put it. Life cycle-relative narratives were told, because of which it was natural to analyze the data across lifespans. From the transcribed material, I separated the themes using colored pencils so that it was easy to locate the themes in the material (Lieblich et al., 1998; Polkinghorne, 1995). In the leaders' descriptions, childhood, youth, schooling, as well as the transition to working life, stood out as clear themes. After this, when further describing the development, themes such as individual supervisor experiences and feedback on one's own activities were selected. Examining the material with the help of themes helped to outline the leaders' journey to becoming leaders and their development path, and that three main factors were selected to describe this overall. These were the positive attitudes toward work and life in general adopted during their childhood and adolescence, meaningful leadership experiences obtained at work, and continuous learning as the foundation of development as a leader.

Although the first publication focuses on the development path of leaders and related themes, in the analysis, I treated the entire research material and its themes according to a holistic approach. For example, leaders' favoring mindset towards education and interest in self-development also came up in other areas of the interviews, but it is also closely related to the development path of leaders in general. Thus, it can be stated that the analysis of the material aligned with typical narrative analysis.

4.3.2 Publication II – Phenomenographical Analysis

The purpose of the second publication was to examine how 'Great Place to Work' leaders perceived successful millennial leadership. I chose a phenomenographical approach because the topic of examination was the ways leaders experience successful leadership and different perceptions and thoughts about related matters. The phenomenographical approach has been used widely, for example, when studying learning (Given, 2008). Phenomenographical research is divided between "first-order" and "second-order" perspectives (Marton, 1981; Yates et al., 2012). This division is intended to clarify the layout of the second-level perspective brought by the researcher, where the researcher creates interpretations from the chosen perspective. Marton (1981) also defines perceptual categories as second-order descriptions on the basis that they are descriptions of other people's perceptions of some phenomenon from their point of view. Phenomenographical research is not focused on what exists, but on how people experience and understand things. Related to this, Sin (2010) highlights the researcher's reflexivity, i.e., reflection on how the research was done and how the information was produced, because the researcher influences how the results are reported and naturally affects the review of the reliability of the research.

My analysis followed the traditional four stage model of phenomenographical analysis (Yates et al., 2012). It was strongly data-driven, as phenomenographical

research does not use, for example, assumptions formed from theories as the basis for testing (Huusko & Paloniemi, 2006). However, it should be noted that it is impossible for the researcher to approach the material without presumptions, and thus Huusko and Paloniemi (2006) like Sin (2010) highlight the researcher's self-reflexivity when doing research.

Analysis of the data started by reading the transcribed text and listening to the recordings. In the transcribed text, I marked the points that were related to the experiences and narration of success. I used analytical questions such as "In what kind of situations has the leader experienced success?", "What things are associated with success?" and "What do leaders think made success possible?" This helped to highlight suitable excerpts, such as direct fragments or sentences, that the leaders had talked about. I tried to find similarities and differences in perceptions, from which I also found the structural factors that link together these different ways of experiencing. After that, I thought about the purposes of the extracts and started to form meaning units from them (Stage 1). Meaning units are not defined in advance based on theory, but the researcher forms them, for example, from the expressions and perceptions of the interview participants.

Forming meaning units required time and reflection and was the most difficult part of the analysis phase (Stage 2). In a situation where the analysis did not proceed at the desired pace, I noticed that I was too close to the material and decided to distance myself. Next, I looked at the meaning units, comparing them, and forming broader entities and subcategories (Stage 2). At this point, units of meaning began to be grouped into broader subcategories, which explained and described the differences in perceptions.

I grouped material excerpts in such a way that they began to form meaning units, for example, "seeing work as valuable", "a high work mentality" and "ambition to develop himself", from which I further formed the subcategory "leadership attitude", which reflects the attitude of leaders. Correspondingly, the subcategory "orientation to well-being at work" included "empowerment" and "leaders' own well-being", which reflected the leaders' attitudes to well-being at work. At different points in the interviews, the leaders emphasized the importance of self-development and the ability to self-reflect, which formed the "ability and will to self-reflect" reflected in the subcategory "openness to change and reflection". These subcategories formed the result category "psychological leadership", which reflects the psychological aspects of successful millennial leadership.

In sub-categorization, a more abstract definition of each sub-category was formed and thus, three different perspectives were identified, forming the result categories "social leadership", "psychological leadership" and "cognitive-operational leadership" (Stage 3). In the last stage of the analysis, the result categories were combined into one main category (Stage 4). The categories have no priority; they are all equally important. The main categories form an abstract construct. In the

end, the main categories form a unified whole (Uljens, 1989, 50) which can also be characterized as an abstract construct. In this research, as a result, GPTW leaders' different ways of perceiving success at work are presented (see also Yates et al., 2012).

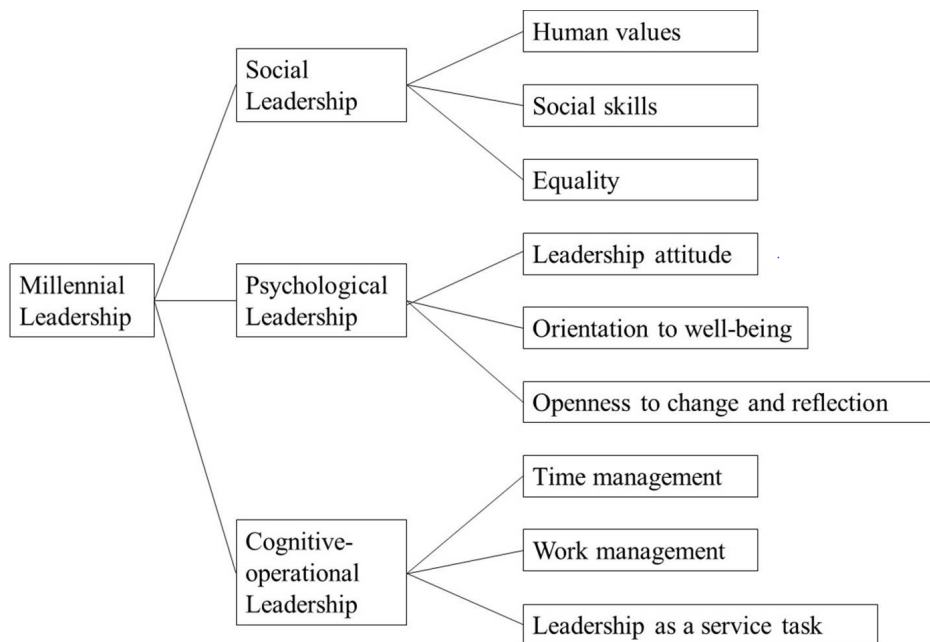


Figure 1. Results and subcategories of factors related to successful millennial leadership

4.3.3 Publication III – Qualitative Content Analysis

The third publication looked at how millennial leaders describe and cope with challenges in their work. Since the goal was to study the leaders' perceptions and thoughts about the challenges, and through this gain a deeper understanding of them and the means of coping with them, content analysis was chosen as the method of this publication. Content analysis is suitable for examining transcribed interview material, not so much for analyzing observation notes (Patton, 2015), as the purpose is to bring out the meanings that appear in the material. My goal was to create a condensed version of the challenges experienced by leaders and ways of coping.

Content analysis is one of the classical procedures for analyzing textual material and the goal is to reduce the material down (Flick, 2014). Content analysis as a research method has long been used in communication, journalism, sociology, psychology, and business (Neuendorf, 2019). The method has been criticized, for example, due to its simplicity and issues related to quality. However, it is essential

to consider the effect of the researcher's work on the presented criticism because content analysis can be anything between its simplicity and complexity, depending on the researcher's work and how thoroughly the phases of the work have been reported (Neuendorf, 2019).

Typically, content analysis is divided into "*inductive*" and "*deductive*" analysis, and they involve the same three steps of preparation, organization of information and presentation of results (Mayring, 2000; Elo et al., 2014). Inductive content analysis is used when there is no previous information on the subject, or the information is very fragmented, and the analysis proceeds based on the material. Elo and Kyngäs (2008) talk about this kind of analysis as open coding, creating categories and abstraction. Correspondingly, deductive analysis is used when you want to test existing information or, for example, models, and the analysis is guided by a classification framework based on previous information. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), in content analysis, the selected text is subjectively interpreted using systematic coding and classification. They, in turn, present three different types of content analysis: conventional, guided, or summative. These different content analysis methods differ in coding methods, code origins, and problems with reliability (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Conventional content analysis is typically used in studies where no existing theory can be directly found or the literature is limited. In a directed approach, the idea is relying on the help brought by theory and the purpose is to test the theory or extend it conceptually. The analysis is strongly guided by pre-built, ready-made categories. In the third method of analysis, Hsieh, and Shannon (2005) describe content analysis as a summative, content-based approach in which words and their frequencies are calculated and compared.

Leaders were asked to freely speak about their thoughts and values related to leadership in general, what kind of challenges they have faced, and how they have tackled them. In this study, a conventional approach, also called a data-driven content analysis, was used. Although the themes were defined in advance, in the interview framework, the analysis itself was not guided by any chosen theory or model. Thus, the conventional approach was well suited, as in Hsieh & Shannon (2005).

Analysis of the material started with reading the transcription so that I could gain an overall understanding. After that, I continued on to a more detailed chapter and started to form codes by marking certain repeated words that contained the leaders' central thoughts and reflections with color. Then, I proceeded by making my own notes about my first impressions, thoughts and findings.

After this, as the process continued, the meanings of the codes began to become clear and began to reflect more than one central idea, as also expressed by Hsieh & Shannon (2005). I combined and separated longer and shorter fragments of the material according to certain characteristics, such as when talking about the challenges of leaders, different concerns clearly come out. For example, I created the

category “*concerns*”, after which I looked at various topics under it and started to form subcategories from them, i.e., I divided “*concerns*” according to their characteristics as follows: “*concerns emerging from outside the workplace*” and “*concerns emerging from inside the workplace*”. I then sorted the codes into categories based on how the different codes are connected and linked (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). After interpreting the nature of the concerns in more detail, the subcategories became the main categories: “*concerns about the future*”, “*concerns related to the work environment*” and “*concerns related to the course of the working day*”. Similarly, when discussing coping with challenges, I coded “*leaders’ positive attitude towards challenges*”, “*interest in learning about difficulties*” and “*self-development*” because these emerged openly from the material. When considering the set research questions, the subcategories “*importance of continuous development*”, “*importance of learning*”, “*learning from mistakes as part of development*”, “*importance of motivation*”, “*belonging to a group*”, “*meaning of work*” and finally “*interest and belief in learning*” became the main categories. These eventually formed the main categories of “*optimism and sense of meaning*”, “*experience of the purpose of work and belonging to a team*” and “*strong self-confidence and learning from mistakes*”. Theories applicable in conventional analysis or other related research results are presented in the discussion section of my study (see also Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

4.4 Ethical Questions and the Researcher’s Position

I evaluate the ethical aspects of my research, as applicable, based on Creswell’s (2014) review, which covers the entire research process as I also noted the ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences in Finland (TENK 2019). When starting the research, I further specified the goals and benefits of my research, as Creswell (2014) also recommends. I could not find similar studies on millennial leadership in the academic research and knowing when doing the research that this generation will probably work for the next twenty or thirty years, it was important to bring out their thoughts on leadership.

This research started from my own interest in leadership. More than fifteen years of work in the international business world—although not as a leader myself—has allowed me to see and experience different situations and accumulate a lot of experience. My own background and subjects of interest influenced the setting of the research, for example, the preparation of the interview questions. As a researcher, I am interested in the world of experience of the researched, and in accordance with the principles of qualitative research, I have tried to make the voice of the researched heard. Patton (2015) also highlights how in a qualitative study the researcher highlights meanings and their effects, for example, by means of an interview, which is also the data collection method of this study.

In the initial phase of data collection, I shared all the basic information about my research with the invited companies in advance; what its purpose was and how the information would be collected. I also expressed my readiness to talk more about the research before possible interviews. In this way, I ensured that the research group has the power to decide whether to participate in the research (TENK, 2019). Creswell (2014) highlights the disproportionate power structure between researcher and participant related to interviews. As a researcher, I tried to create such an atmosphere in the interviews that the interviewee could, at any point, just ask to delete what he or she had said or refuse to answer a certain theme or question. Therefore, I can say that I have tried to minimize the possible negative effects of the power structure with my choices. Creswell (2014; see also TENK, 2019) also highlights the recommendation to avoid collecting information that could harm the research participant or identify them. In my research, some very sensitive information was revealed, which I deliberately left out in the research report to protect the participant and their identity.

When analyzing the interview data, Creswell (2014) warns against reporting only positive research results or formulating results that are favorable to the researched. As a fairly novice researcher, this perspective made me examine my results even more critically and refine my analytical process as well. I went through the analysis steps of the three sub-publications again and when creating this summary, I tried to make sure that all perspectives are presented in the research results. This step was not easy, but very important from the point of view of the reliability of the research. This work phase was also important because I realized during it how much trust and encouragement I had received from the interviewees for the implementation of the research. In telling their stories, leaders showed their trust and thus, I also feel a deep obligation to share their views as they were shared with me. In summary, it can be stated that as a researcher, my actions must be ethical throughout and must be truthful – to the leaders who participated in the research, the research community, the public and myself. Truthfulness and criticality as a concrete practice means writing respectfully about leaders, and at the same time, as a requirement of research ethics, as a researcher, I must strive for scientific quality in the results and reporting. According to Maxwell (2013), one of the researcher's most important tasks in qualitative research is to deal with their own possible biases and think about the subsequent effects, both positive and negative, on the research. Before starting my research, I had thought about leadership and especially what motivates leaders and how different leaders might be. My thinking stemmed entirely from my own experiences in working life. The choice of the research topic and my interest in the theories of positive psychology were an influence in that the millennial leaders were recruited from workplaces that have been positively evaluated as GPTW and that the theoretical approach had an emphasis on positive leadership perspectives.

The privacy of research participants was protected in my research (Creswell, 2014) by coding the interviewees with numbers, removing all identifiable information from the material excerpts, such as the location, company name or names of persons, and the names of participating companies were also removed. In relation to the presentation of research results, Creswell (2014) brings up an essential requirement related to the correct reporting of information, according to which the researcher must present an accurate explanation of the research information. This was adhered to in this study by giving as precise a description as possible of the analytical process of the material and thus, of how the information was produced. The material excerpts from the interviews embody the views of the leaders for the reader.

5 Results

5.1 Growth Narratives of Millennial Leaders

The purpose of Publication I was to describe the growth of millennial leaders as leaders with the narrative approach. In this publication, the questions were *how leaders describe their growth as leaders* and *which factors have supported them in their development as leaders*. The results showed that growing into a leader is gradual, and when looking at growth as a sustainable process throughout the life cycle, three significant factors emerged. The first of these was *a positive attitude towards work and life in general*, which the leaders had already adopted in childhood and youth. The second was *significant own leadership experiences from a work career* and the third was *the importance of continuous learning as a leader's development*.

A positive attitude towards work and life in general came out clearly in the leaders' interviews. When explaining their journey to become a leader, the leaders' narratives typically began with the narration of memories of childhood, school and hobbies. The narration of these experiences was colored by positivity and, for example, parents' own attitudes and positive attitudes towards work was felt to be important.

...”but my own parents have been leaders...my mother has been with me; I've gotten a lot from her a lot of understanding of what it is that belongs to management in a way and has been talked about those things at home anyway” (Leader 6).

The leaders' own leadership experiences during their working careers emerged as another factor in the leaders' narratives. The transition to the most demanding managerial levels, and from there to leadership positions, was seen as a significant transition also from the perspective of identity, during which leaders had to process their own role from the new position of leader. Encouragement from, for example, one's family or coach and encouragement from one's superiors was perceived as important support in this transition and development phase.

...” then I remember saying that (leadership) is not my thing, that it doesn't appeal to me. I'd much rather be the one who does than the one who tells others what to do. (I had) a rather strong expert identity and, as it were, the identity of a role that delivers. But then when I ended up in a sales position and was successful and got feedback from my manager at the time and... I got to see from the side what leadership can be, I started to see it more as an opportunity...” (Leader 16)

The leaders' journeys to become leaders were strongly characterized by a positive attitude towards development, not so much a goal of being a leader one day. The interviews strongly connected *the importance of continuous learning as a leader's development*. This was manifested in the leaders' narratives describing their journey, emphasizing, for example, the role of important communities such as family and parents or superiors in developing as a leader, learning experiences in the work community and the importance of received feedback. Continuous development came up when leaders noted how they strive to develop themselves constantly, for example, by listening to podcasts or reading industry literature also in their free time.

"At least for me, it's extremely motivating when you think that the desire to develop is so bottomless. ..." (Leader 15)

The second research question sought to find out *which factors supported the development of leaders, as told by themselves*. The leaders' strong ability to self-reflect could be one of the reasons why they very strongly believed that everyday activities play a significant role in the development of leadership skills. When discussing development methods, the experiences of working situations and learning from them were seen as important factors promoting development. Four key forms that support development emerged in the leaders' interviews and these were *feedback, role models, the will and ability to do self-reflection and support from colleagues*.

The importance of feedback as a promoter and supporter of one's own development was clear and its importance appeared repeatedly in different areas of the interview, not only when discussing ways to develop. The leaders valued feedback and had also developed ways to ask for and receive it, for example, from their subordinates or their supervisor. A strong desire to receive feedback shows the service attitude of leaders towards others, as they strive to be enablers for their own leaders through their own actions.

"Well, of course I try to collect feedback from people, to be very approachable in that I appreciate it and I've made it clear that I must come and say if someone thinks I'm a bad person...Because otherwise I won't be able to make any changes in that matter...then to develop through peer feedback and through peer evaluations, that's one way..." (Leader 14)

The importance of role models for developing as a leader manifested in two ways. The leaders gained trust and faith in their own abilities by following their own superiors, as well as working models that were perceived as bad. This either created the belief that they too could possibly develop into leaders or clarified what kind of leaders they themselves would and would not like to be. Working around someone they respected, on the other hand, gave the leaders a role model

of what it could be like to work as a leader and enabled a so-called mirror to reflect one's own abilities.

“Lack of good models in leadership... I often compare it to upbringing, how you have been led yourself and what kind of leadership you have witnessed around you. Yes, it will appear quite strongly there (on the field). When you have been lucky enough to have had skilled and good managers right from the beginning in this career. It has given it completely different starting points than what you imagine yourself to be, what leadership would be like before you could see it so closely.” (Leader 16)

The leaders had adopted self-reflection in their own work and activities and *the will and ability to do self-reflection* came out clearly in the leaders' narrations. They reflected on their own strengths and development areas openly, which was a sign that they had developed the capacity for self-reflection. Self-reflection was seen as a prerequisite for development, as one of the leaders strongly stated. When looking at their own activities, the leaders mentioned how they try to react, for example, to the development of their own activities, which can be seen as talking about their ability to self-directed activities.

“Self-reflection is important so that you could afterwards reflect your own doing. It is the only way to proceed forward.” (Leader 7)

Collegial support, for example from one's own coach or co-worker, was seen as an important factor in the development of leadership skills. Especially in challenging situations, the support of others was seen as important to be able to get different perspectives and ways of solving things. In an interaction with a colleague where solutions for challenging situations are discussed, for example, the leader builds his or her own leader image and this can be seen as an important part of leadership development.

“When I went through that (certain training) I analyzed myself a lot and my colleagues and others analyzed me too, which helped me tremendously and then I took it (decision-making) as one of the areas for development.” (Leader 12)

The usefulness of official training and events was also brought up as a development method of leaders, even though the daily activities presented above, and the development that takes place as a result, were mentioned by the leaders. Some of the interviewees, for example, had further education or were completing some further training alongside their day job and found it meaningful.

5.2 Millennial Leaders' Perceptions of Successful Leadership

The purpose of Publication II was to define the core of millennial leadership. The question was *how do 'Great Place to Work' leaders perceive successful millennial leadership* and the objective was to understand how millennial leaders perceive themselves as leaders and successful leadership in today's workplaces. Three leadership dimensions from the millennial leaders' perceptions could be distinguished as the main perspectives from which to view successful millennial leadership. These were the *social*, *psychological*, and *cognitive-operational leadership*.

Social Leadership

The importance of social skills was emphasized in the leaders' interviews, as the leader must be able to connect with each member of their team. Social skills are constantly used when a leader communicates and interacts with others. Therefore, the first perspective was the social leadership category, which included elements that emphasized interpersonal relationships and related values in the work of leaders. Social leadership consisted of three subcategories: *human values*, *social skills*, and *equality*.

Human values appeared in leaders' perceptions as positive attitudes, values, interest towards people and the importance of work-life balance. The leaders' spoke about leadership humanely, meaning that the leaders' description emphasized their positive attitude and interest towards their subordinates. When discussing what was perceived as motivating in leadership, caring, respect for others and trust stood out clearly. The leaders' interest in people seemed very genuine and their responses conveyed that they like working with people. Humanism also manifested in the way the leaders spoke about people holistically, considering other areas of life besides work, such as family, hobbies, and free time.

"...however, a leader is a human being and every management team is full of people... so that's what motivates you - some may be motivated by money and some may be motivated by winning, some may be motivated by the growth of interpersonal skills or subordinates... sometimes it feels really bad (management) and sometimes it feels like the number one thing in the world, that when people succeed and they themselves have been able to make it possible that they have been allowed to try and succeed. Yes, it's a sickly great feeling." (Leader 14)

Social skills contributed to successful leadership in leaders' perceptions through co-operation and interaction, working in a group, human knowledge, empathy and listening. When the leaders were thinking about what has been important to them from the point of view of their own development and growth, the importance of cooperation and interaction skills came up. Interpersonal skills were perceived as a quality of a good leader.

The results showed that teamwork and cooperation with other leaders and seeing oneself as a strong part of the team were emphasized when discussing the leaders' experiences of success or failure. The leaders perceived themselves as active members of the team and believed their own actions had meaning and value. The leader can be considered responsible for the formation of good group dynamics, and thus it can be considered natural that the interviewed leaders raised the importance of group activities in the interviews.

The leaders perceived good human knowledge of people and empathic skills as factors that influenced their success. Interest in people and empathic skills may have helped leaders develop a deeper connection with employees, which in turn has strengthened trust in the leader-employee relationship. When leaders see the best in their subordinates, they help build trust and good relationships between people.

“The empathy side and people’s feelings and meeting people as a person and not just as a business, that’s probably where I’m at my best. Finding how to align that person’s work effort with our business goal.” (Leader 11)

The leaders understood the importance of listening as a characteristic of a good leader and as a factor influencing success or failure. Effective listening leads to more productive and constructive discussions, whereas not listening may cause ambiguities in, for example, role assignments and, with this, failures, such as project schedule delays.

The last or third subcategory of social leadership is *equality*. The leaders' responses showed a striving for egalitarian activities, and the leaders particularly emphasized the desire to be close to people and develop and encourage them. Striving for equal action was mediated by the leaders' respect for other people.

Psychological leadership

The category of psychological leadership describes leaders' perceptions of how they valued their work, the nature of leadership, and their development as leaders. This category included the subcategories *leadership attitude*, *orientation to work well-being*, and *openness to change and reflection*.

The *leaders' attitude* towards work and life was positive throughout and conveyed a realistic picture of all aspects of the leaders' work. The leaders' positive attitude manifested in their way of seeing work as valuable, a high work mentality and a desire to develop themselves at work.

“...I appreciate the fact that company X has given me the opportunity to be here, and it has been in a certain way my goal to get to this position.” (Leader 2)

Leaders were aware of the challenges of the job, such as schedule pressure, great responsibility and difficult decisions. A positive attitude to work was reflected in the leaders' goal setting. They trusted that adversity would come and that it is possible to overcome it, and this showed a high work mentality. They were also very strongly aware of the need for continuous self-improvement to be able to function well in their work and they gave the impression that the desire to develop was born from within themselves.

"...I like that there are always new challenges and that I get to try and think about different things in a slightly different way. (Leader 4)

The *orientation to well-being* was connected to leaders' perceptions of success. The leaders' holistic approach to life created space for well-being. A few of the leaders said that they had either been really close to burnout themselves or had gotten sick from burnout, because of which they had learned and were aware of nurturing well-being.

"...I feel that many strengths may also be big weaknesses in certain situations... I have pushed myself to the limits of my endurance many times in my life and then it demands a lot from myself, and I have had to learn from it..." (Leader 9)

The third important element of psychological leadership was the *ability and willingness to self-reflect*. The leaders were prompted to talk about their own activities and values. The service attitude of the leaders was conveyed by their way of relating to themselves, as they felt that they played a significant role in enabling the success of others, and for them to realize this, they had to be constantly alert to develop themselves.

Cognitive-operational leadership

The category of cognitive-operational leadership consisted of perceptions related to *time* and *work management*, as well as attitude towards *leadership as a service task* and in general. Leaders understood *time management* challenges to be part of their work challenges and moments of failure. The leaders realized that they constantly have more work than they can do and thus, prioritizing time was perceived as a challenge and its management had failed. This had naturally caused the leaders to feel bad, but at the same time, also taught them how to prioritize time and delegate work.

"Managing this X seems quite easy after that (laughs). And I learned a lot in that, such as that this deadline is a deadline, and that time management is learned the hard way." (Leader 23)

The results showed that good *work management* came to the fore when leaders were thinking about issues affecting success. Work management consisted of work organization, managing a wide area of responsibility and decision making. Good work management was combined with efficient work organization, the ability to manage large areas of responsibility and the ability to lead towards goals. To be successful, a leader must ultimately be the one to show direction and makes the decision. Correspondingly, situations where there has been ambiguity in goals, or roles and situations where decisions have been made too quickly, produced experiences of failure for a few interviewees.

The leaders spoke respectfully and positively about their subordinates, which showed that they valued both them and themselves as leaders. The leaders' way of experiencing success from the successes of others, their willingness to help and support when needed and to make things possible reflected their service attitude.

Therefore, the last category in this perspective is *leadership as a service task*. The leaders felt they were there for their group, and their narrative style conveyed an effort to break away from command-type leadership and towards the servant leadership style.

“...Well yes, it will probably return in a certain way to those core values and sources of motivation, that it is great if you can help people move forward and the service attitude in a certain way is close to my heart.” (Leader 1)

5.3 Challenges and Resources that Typify the Nature of Millennial Leadership

The purpose of Publication III was to understand what kind of challenges millennial leaders encounter at work and what type of resources they identify when dealing with these challenges. From the results, it was possible to distinguish two types of perspectives in examining the challenges. The first was the challenges in the future and the second was related to challenges surrounding to human activity. I will first describe the challenges, and then present my observations about the resources identified by the leaders for overcoming them.

Challenges

The leaders found things related to *the future and the operating environment* to be challenging. These challenges are united by their nature – they are not directly in the leaders' control. In the interviews, concern about future uncertainty and how work might be affected was emphasized. For example, concern about the continuity of work, the development of the industry and the employees' ability to tolerate changes was reflected in the leaders' stories. The constant increase in competition

was perceived as challenging, which had a concrete effect in the form of increased workload and financial pressure. The financial pressure had caused some of the leaders to lay off their subordinates, or some had received information about the need for layoffs in the future. Situations like this were perceived as very heavy on an emotional level. Uncertainty about the industry's job prospects and economic development was also perceived as challenging.

“Yes, we now have a very difficult situation because this big project will end at the turn of the year and 15 people will be left unemployed.” (Leader 20)

The leaders said that they face many different *challenges in their daily work*. Management is an interactive activity that takes place between people, which is why it can involve human misunderstandings and mistakes.

The leaders also emphasized that when working with people, there can be many kinds of emotions and situations, and challenging development discussions and layoff situations were perceived as very sensitive. Feedback about poor performance also caused challenges for some of the leaders, and even though the leader had good reasons for such feedback, their compassion and empathy for the employee caused difficult feelings. The importance of emotional skills became apparent when the leaders talked about situations where an employee could talk about their own personal concerns that affect being at work, and in that case, the leader must be able to support the employee and organize workloads at the same time. In another example, the leader must be able to limit the amount of work the employee does if a risk of burnout is noticeable. The leader's own emotional states, handling and tolerating them also required awareness from the leaders.

“The most difficult situations are situations where you must do certain things due to the law or rules, to act in a robotic way in a situation where there are people or big emotions.” (Leader 7)

Almost all leaders repeatedly mentioned time challenges. The leaders were willing to spend more time with their subordinates, but the practice did not allow it, and because of this, for example, they also considered the issue from the perspective of equality.

Resources

The leaders' resources in challenging situations appeared versatile and are classified into four different main groups. First, I will look at the leader's *genuine interest and belief in learning and coping*. Leadership itself interested and inspired the leaders, which influenced their attitude towards leadership. The leaders saw challenges and difficult situations as a natural part of leadership and were not directly afraid of

them, even if they caused unpleasant feelings and uncertainty. The leaders realized that giving time to both themselves and the challenging matter helped them cope with difficult situations and issues. Being aware of one's own limits was felt to be important, especially in situations where the leader enthusiastically takes on challenges and thus, exposes themselves to too much strain.

"I get excited, it's a good thing, but it's also a burden in between. I get excited about new things and then things sometimes get lost." (Leader 3)

The leaders' *optimism and sense of meaning* manifested in the way they approach and cope with challenges, and leadership as a job in general. Learning was viewed positively and even though the uncertainties of the future seemed challenging, they were viewed with confidence. Optimism appeared to be a clear asset for leaders.

"Somehow, I am extremely optimistic, and, in a way, I do not see an opportunity you will not survive..." (Leader 9)

The leaders felt that they had learned from challenging situations and realized that they cannot, and should not, be avoided. As a part of the field of leadership, they contribute to bringing a sense of meaning to the important role of a leader.

The leaders valued their work and found the responsibility given to them meaningful. The leaders' *experience of the purpose* of work appeared as a third perspective for coping with challenges. They felt that it was meaningful that they could direct effort towards a common goal and have an important role in the face of challenges. The leaders felt that working together was meaningful, which further strengthened the relevance of the leaders' own work. The leaders felt that what they were doing also brought meaning to other people. Leaders valued well-being at work and helping and supporting subordinates was perceived as meaningful, which certainly strengthened the leaders' mental perseverance in coping with challenges of very different levels.

"And the purpose of being a leader is further emphasized by the fact that you are proud of what that company does, then I am proud to be able to choose the people who do the job and direct and sort of steer to the big picture... if I succeed in it then it is true a big impact on one person's life and significance comes through it more." (Leader 18)

Most of the interviewees had already managed to act as a leader for years, during which time they could experience many kinds of challenges. Leaders' *strong self-confidence and learning from mistakes* appeared as the fourth perspective for coping with challenges. The leaders strongly believed that their own actions had an

impact in challenging situations, for example as decision makers when the situation demanded it. The leaders also trusted in people's ability to develop and learn and saw themselves as able to influence the development and possible transformation of their subordinates.

6 Discussion

6.1 Definition of Millennial Leadership

The goal of my research was to create a description of millennial leadership. The research is based on the thoughts, perceptions, and experiences of millennial leaders themselves in the award-winning 'Great Place to Work' companies in 2020. The main research question was examined from three different perspectives of millennial leadership: growth as leaders, successful leadership, and challenges and resources in leadership.

Millennial leadership appeared a very humane activity, which was manifested by the leaders' comprehensive and understanding attitude towards humanity and leadership in general. The millennial leaders valued leadership in all its aspects and a goal of continuous development and learning was strongly present in their responses. The millennial leaders' growth stories shared a positive attitude towards working life and life in general, which was already present in their upbringing and early education. The results confirmed previous research findings that leader development is, on one hand, multidimensional and on the other, a context-specific process (see also Day, 2011; Day & Dragoni, 2015; Murphy & Johnson, 2011). This research showed that there are several growth and leadership paths, and a specific model cannot be determined even if common features are found. The value of continuous development and support and positive interaction and encouragement from, for example, one's superior or colleague are essential in the development of millennial leaders.

Valuing and emphasizing continuous development was particularly typical for growth as a leader. A strong growth mindset (see also Dweck, 2007) united the millennial leaders as they believed in their own strengths, their development, and the future. The millennial leaders' optimistic and realistic attitude towards leadership challenges was shown in their ways of perceiving failures as opportunities to become a better leader (see also Hyvärinen et al., 2018; Uusiautti et al., 2012). Striving for positive development as leaders was manifested by strong interest in receiving feedback and learning new things (see also Ashford & DeRue, 2012). As Day (2011) noted, a leader cannot be effective without continuous, lifelong learning.

Murphy and Johnson's (2011) lifelong approach to leader development is well suited to examine the development of millennial leaders in this study, as many similarities were found. Most of the millennial leaders said that they were ambitious at school and were especially aware of the importance of studying. The

millennial leaders' ambition and participation in sports activities, for example in the role of a captain, were visible and could be the first signs of budding leadership. Through sports activities, many skills needed for leadership can be learned, such as self-interest, competitive spirit, task and ego-centeredness, vision, intelligence, developing self-efficacy, focus on winning, and developing and enjoying the flow experience (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Murphy and Johnson (2011, 460) refer to sensitivity period thinking (Bornstein, 1989), according to which, the practice of certain skills at a certain age is more favorable and meaningful and can allow for better use of the skill in the future. This alone is not enough to explain the development of certain skills in leaders, but serves as an interesting perspective on, for example, the further development of skills learned in early childhood as an adult or as a leader. The millennial leaders' good experiences at work in general and acting as a leader strengthened their own confidence and faith, and this can be seen as a self-reinforcing process (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). The millennial leaders' own leadership experiences and encouragement from their superiors or colleagues have served as incentives for taking on the role of a leader. The millennial leaders talked about their meaningful leadership experiences, where, for example, positive feedback has played a significant role, and even though developing from an individual role to the role of a leader was perceived as challenging, it can be seen as an effective stage in a leader's development. Thus, in the words of Murphy and Johnson (2011), good experiences create a snowball effect where similar experiences feed each other. This was confirmed in the millennial leaders' narratives.

Successful millennial leadership had many features in common with theories of positive leadership. A strong belief in learning and growth, self-knowledge and ethically sustainable activities were noticeable. Taking care of one's own and subordinates' coping strategies was felt to be important, which embodies the sustainable values of work and is in line with the current development of working life (see also Eiffe, 2021). Successful millennial leadership was characterized by human values, uniqueness, creativity, and self-actualization. Millennial leaders considered it important to have good and unhurried interaction and to have enough time with those they manage. Perhaps the millennial leaders' genuine interest in people and the desire to support and act as the backbone of all interactions enables humane leadership. Managing people involves interaction, listening, discussion and presence. When these are implemented, we can talk about successful millennial leadership, which aims at sustainable work results (see also Eiffe, 2021).

Sustainable work consists of good work characteristics such as cooperation, opportunities to influence, enjoyment of work, and strong working relationships (Abrahamsson, 2021). In the interviews, values respecting people came out more than the traditional idea of leadership focusing on results and customers. A positive attitude towards management, people and growth described the leaders' thoughts while also paying attention to the success of the company they managed (see also

Uusiautti & Hyvärinen, 2020). The ideology of sustainable work appeared as a strong contribution to the leaders' work but also to other needs. Some, in connection with burnout, had learned to draw a stricter line between work and free time and with free time, they did not just want to recover from work but also save energy for other things in life. The opportunity for millennial leaders to work according to their values while maintaining their health and ability to work showed their willingness to work sustainably and they wanted this for their subordinates as well. This embodies the millennial leaders' ability to think according to the principles of sustainable work.

Accelerating work pace, increased remote work, busyness, high performance expectations and conflict situations are present in every workplace and according to Meng et al. (2017), millennials are concerned about work-life balance. Companies must also secure their competitiveness in the future, which pressures the performance of the personnel. Thus, the well-being of personnel increases, and leaders play an important role in this. Research results (see e.g., Dellve et al., 2007) support the beneficial aspects of investing in occupational well-being and, for example, teamwork, training, and information sharing have been seen to generally improve the well-being experienced by employees (Böckerman et al., 2012). In addition, positive functions and financial capacity have been linked to work atmosphere, staff turnover, and organizational effectiveness (Cameron et al., 2011).

The millennial leaders' positive and realistic attitudes towards leadership in all its aspects, as well as their interest and perseverance, have supported them in the face of various challenges. The spectrum of challenges shows that the field of activity of millennial leaders is very diverse and thus, the challenges are also diverse, ranging from outside the operating environment to everyday challenges that are naturally part of a leader's daily work. The accelerating pace of working life and the requirement to adapt to a wide variety of management situations, as well as the readiness to renew oneself constantly, creates pressure for leaders. The desire for innovation as well as the challenges themselves inspired the millennial leaders, which supported them in coping with the challenges. Optimism and understanding that challenges are part of the millennial leaders' work helped them to face challenges and deal with them. The sense of purpose and knowledge that the millennial leader's work is important provided strength and created faith that their investment has an effect. The millennial leaders saw that they were able to influence the development and possible transformation of their subordinates, which gave them self-confidence and certainty that they can learn from mistakes and overcome challenges.

Millennials' way of thinking about challenges and ways to deal with them can be viewed from the perspective of grit (Duckworth et al., 2007), as its elements – interest, practice, purpose, and hope – were clearly visible in the interviews. Interest and passionate action in challenging situations manifest a passion for leadership, and a positive attitude and thinking about difficult situations from a “practice”

perspective helped to cope with challenges and showed the leaders' perseverance. The millennial leaders emphasized the importance of taking care of well-being, which certainly strengthened the leaders' experience of the importance of their own work. Leadership was perceived as one's own, which certainly increased the importance of the leaders' experience of their own work. The discussion of challenging situations in the spirit of growth thinking showed the leaders' strong faith in their own learning and efforts.

The research results are conclusions about what the leaders say according to me as a researcher, i.e., the thoughts and actions they shared in the interviews. These millennial leaders are a special group, and they know how to and, according to their story, have created success in work communities. This can also be considered from the perspective of Implicit Leadership Theories (ILT), according to which, each of us has personal assumptions about the qualities and abilities that characterize the ideal business leader. According to Epitropaki and Martin (2004), ILTs represent "cognitive structures or schemas that define the traits and behaviors followers expect from leaders". Social events, relationships, and previous leadership experiences shape leaders' thoughts, forming leadership prototypes (Epitropaki and Martin, 2004, 2005; Nichols, 2015). For example, as management experience increased for women, the desirability of dominant traits decreased, while the desirability of cooperative traits remained stable in both men and women (Nichols, 2015). Thus, it must be stated that the results of this study highlight the thoughts of this select group from the perspective of the selected theoretical frameworks and at this moment. Thus, the leaders interviewed may know, or show that they know, what the qualities of a good leader are and what is expected of their behavior.

6.2 Credibility

The reliability of research methods is often examined using the terms "*validity*", which means that the research has examined what was promised, and "*reliability*", meaning that the research results are repeatable (Shenton 2004; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The definitions "validity" and "reliability" have many more precise definitions related to their content and Maxwell (2013, p. 122) states succinctly that "the concept of validity has been controversial in qualitative research". He continues by defining validity as the research's descriptions, conclusions, explanations, interpretations, and the like, remaining correct. Against this definition, I also examine the correctness of this study. The reliability of qualitative research can be also viewed from many different perspectives. For this reason, the stages of the research, starting from its planning to its implementation and analysis of the research material, and ending with its evaluation, have been accurately described to convey to the reader as comprehensive a picture as possible of its implementation

and the results and conclusions presented. In qualitative research, the assessment of reliability must be done throughout the entire research period and is an inseparable part of the research process (Kvale, 2007). Next, I will present a reliability analysis of this research followed by a specific reliability evaluation of each publication.

Reliability as a whole

In my reliability analysis, I use the four criticisms presented by Guba (1981), which are *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability* (see also Patton, 2015). Shenton (2004) utilities and highlights how the researcher can demonstrate the four criteria of reliability mentioned by Guba (1981) in reliability assessment. According to Shenton (2004), for credibility in the evaluation, the task of the researcher is to show as broad and detailed a description of the phenomenon under study. The purpose of this study was to create a description of millennial leadership as told by GPTW leaders. The aim was to create a multidimensional picture of what millennial leadership looks like. Methodologically, the study used three different analysis methods for qualitative data, because the problem setting of the sub-studies was different in nature. In the first part of the study, my goal was to create a narrative about the growth of individuals into leaders, so the narrative approach was perfectly suited. In the second part of the study, I was interested in understanding the leaders' different perceptions and experiences of success, in which case, the phenomenographical approach served me well. In the third part of the study, the goal was to understand the challenges and resources of leaders, and with the help of content analysis, I was able to form and group challenges for a more detailed examination. In the theoretical part, I examined the phenomenon of leadership especially in the light of positive psychology.

From the examination of *credibility*, I highlight the advance familiarization with the world of the subjects mentioned by Shenton (2004). When writing the research plan, I thought about how to narrow down the research group and familiarized myself with various possibilities, such as whether I would study leaders who received the title of Kauppalehti's 'Business Manager of the Year' or the awards given by a Chamber of Commerce for good leadership. To narrow down the research groups, I decided to focus on the millennial generation, which personally interests me as it is heavily represented in modern working life and because I belong to that generation. The millennial generation has another 20-30 years of working career ahead of them and thus, their thoughts and views are important.

There were numerous options, but I ended up deciding on GPTW companies which have been identified as a good workplace based on external and internal evaluations. GPTW leaders were considered as a particularly interesting research target because they work in companies that invest in a good corporate culture and systematically develop their operations. It can therefore be assumed that leaders working in GPTW companies are used to the need for continuous development,

both business-wise and personally. The GPTW concept seemed interesting and clear.

Shenton (2004) emphasizes how, in examining credibility, every research participant must be given the opportunity to refuse participation. The voluntary nature was emphasized in communication with both companies and individuals. Random sampling is also a measure of credibility (Shenton, 2004) and this was realized in this study because the interviewees were chosen randomly so that as a researcher, I did not control the selection of interviewees in any way except for the age group. According to Shenton (2004), a description of the researcher's background, qualifications and experience increases the credibility of the research, and as a novice researcher, my strength is a deep interest in the phenomenon under study and more than fifteen years of work experience in an international company. I have worked in organizations of different sizes with representatives of different nationalities and generations. This experience sparked a desire to deeply understand the phenomenon of leadership as it appeared more complex than just a practical experience.

Another part of the reliability criteria defined by Guba (1981) is research *transferability* and Shenton (2004) adds that the researcher should describe the context and phenomenon of the research. In chapter 4.1, I have described the world view of the research and chapter 4.2 deals with the work phases and choices, including how research participants were selected and their introductions. I also described in detail the stages of the analysis of the three publications of fieldwork and research.

In reliability analysis, Guba's (1981) third dimension is *dependability*, which means that the course of the research should be reported in detail so that another researcher could carry out a similar study (Shenton, 2004). This goal has been pursued throughout in this summary section, describing all phases of the research as thoroughly as possible and the working methods.

The fourth dimension of reliability analysis (Guba, 1981) is *confirmability*, according to which, the researcher must show that the results are based on the studied material and not, for example, his own views (Shenton, 2004). Shenton (2004) highlights the role of triangulation which can be promoted as confirmability. In this study, the data acquisition method was uniform in all three sub-studies, but triangulation was implemented in the analysis of the data, enabling different approaches to describing the phenomenon. In theory triangulation, the selected phenomenon is examined through different theoretical perspectives to see which framework most convincingly aligns with the data (Patton, 2015). In addition, the results of the three publications were published in international articles that I worked on together with two other researchers. Thus, triangulation can be considered to have been realized in the writing process, the goal of which has been to diversify viewpoints (Wray et al., 2007). Theory triangulation can be seen as realized as the phenomenon of leadership has been examined in the light of different theories. In

addition, an attempt has been made to show the reader how the research results have been arrived at with quotes from the material of the research interviews. The result chapter has considered how the results are reflected in similar studies, and Shenton (2004) states that this is one factor that increases the credibility of the reliability review.

Willing millennial leaders from GPTW companies in 2020 were selected as the target group of the study. GPTW companies can be seen to invest especially in the well-being and development of personnel when they are involved in the GPTW project. The project embodies the importance of continuous development and people's well-being. It can therefore be assumed that the leaders are interested and positive about development and this might support their willingness to participate in this research as well. All participating companies were growth companies, which could also affect the leaders' enthusiasm and passion for learning new things. If the interview material came from a different source, it might have been of a different nature and different issues might have emerged. This aspect also supports the case-specificity of the research, and it is essential to view the results in this light. In addition, the period when the data was collected certainly had an impact on its content – most of the leaders worked remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the entirety of working life can be seen to have been in transition due to the sudden increase in remote work and new ways of working (Waters et al., 2021). The research results could therefore have been different when studying a different target group at a different time.

Our way of seeing and understanding the world is clearly neither the only nor natural way of understanding it. In terms of this research, this means, for example, that although we classify the research target group as “millennial leaders”, this is not the only possible way to study the corresponding target group and understand the world. The research has therefore made a certain choice to use millennialism and the GPTW project for our classifications. According to Burr (1998), groups may be talked about as if their members have common characteristics, but the opposite could also be true. The research group could also be classified based on, for example, school success or educational background. These choices have an impact on world outlook and what kind of research it ultimately turns out to be.

Reliability in Publications I-III

Since the three publications of my study used different research approaches, I will also examine the reliability of each of them. In qualitative research, different emphases and concepts can be seen in the evaluations of different research methods, and thus it is essential to evaluate the reliability of each publication from this point of view. My first publication was a narrative study, and in examining its reliability, I use the five principles drawn up by Heikkinen et al. (2012) which are: historical continuity, reflexivity, dialectics, workability and ethics, and evocativeness.

The principle of *historical continuity* recognizes the continuous development of the phenomenon being studied, which means that development does not start from a vacuum, and does not end either (Heikkinen et al., 2012). Leadership can be a phenomenon that touches people to some extent, but which nevertheless manifests itself and is built up in every person individually. I have looked at leadership in general and tried to reflect my own research on previous research. In accordance with the *reflexivity* (Heikkinen et al., 2012) principle, I can also examine my own relationship with the research object and see both strengths and weaknesses in it. My genuine interest in the subject and my work experience in the operation of a large international organization may have unconsciously affected my work, for example, as an overly positive and understanding attitude towards the stories of the leaders. On the other hand, due to my age, I belong to the millennial generation, and thus I experienced the interviewed leaders from an equal position, although the researcher-interviewee roles prevailed in the interviews. In the analysis phase, I consciously try to exclude my own preconceptions and perceptions about the subject and thus produce the most truthful analysis possible.

In the principle of *dialectics* (Heikkinen et al., 2012), polyphonicity is considered, and in my research, I have tried to bring out different leaders experiences, especially in their emphasis. Heikkinen et al. (2012) consider the workability and ethics of research by the principle of functionality. The central contribution of my research to the field of leadership is to bring a fresh description of millennial leadership. The research can be used, for example, in the planning of leadership training. According to the principle of *evocativeness*, research should open new perspectives on the subject for the reader (Heikkinen et al., 2012). I hope that this research would stimulate discussion about the different elements of leadership and open new perspectives to look at leadership and its development.

I use Sin's (2010) definitions when examining the quality of my phenomenographical, second publication. The use of a phenomenographical research sample was justified as it sought to describe the different types of leader's perceptions of successful leadership. The number of interviewees was reasonable and enabled rich material. Sin (2010) highlights the importance of accurately describing the interviewees, for example, talking about their backgrounds, allowing the reader to make his or her own assessment. In the interview situation itself, the researcher should be as neutral as possible, use the same terms as the interviewee and, for example, use the intentional-expressive method in the layout of the questions. By this, Sin (2010) means that the interviewer tries to clarify and to confirm the conceptual meanings of expressions by asking additional clarifying questions and avoid leading questions. I kept this goal in mind while conducting the interviews, and as the interviews progressed, I noticed how I improved in this area. For this reason, I conducted a total of 28 interviews, which also enabled me to develop my own skills along the way. To enable deep and versatile understanding of the interview material, I worked on

transcribing the material myself. Sin (2010) also considered the importance of small gestures and tone of voice in creating perceptions of meaning, and thus my own notes, the research diary, and the transcription being worked on by myself supported this goal.

The most challenging phase of phenomenographical research from the point of view of reliability can be seen as the analysis of the material, where concepts should be examined in relation to each other and not individually. Defining the categories of meaning was sometimes difficult, and here discussions about my interpretations with supervisors helped form the results categories. Sin (2010) also highlights the power of working together, especially in the case of a novice researcher. There must be something distinctive about the research results of the concept of each category, the categories must be optimal and restrained and the relationship between them must be clearly expressed (Sin, 2010). When presenting the results of the research, I highlighted the differences between the categories and the relationships between them. Reliability was also strengthened by including data excerpts (Sin, 2010). I also strengthened the differences between the categories with headings, defining, for example, the more theoretical main categories of the result categories with the names social, psychological, and cognitive-operational leadership.

When it came to the content analysis in Publication III, the semi-structured interview method made it possible to ask the leaders about certain themes but did not overly guide their answers and allowed for follow-up questions depending on the response. Using Elo et al.'s (2014) recommendations, I started preliminary data analysis already during the interviews, when I noticed that certain same themes, such as leaders experiencing challenges related to time, came up repeatedly. Thus, I noticed when data saturation began to happen. An important step in examining the trustworthiness of the content analysis is to assess how openly and clearly the analysis of the material has been carried out (Elo et al., 2014). In chapter 4, I presented the steps of the conventional analysis that I used with the help of examples so that the reader would be able to assess on what basis and which steps were taken to form the interpretation. As suggested by Elo et al. (2014), in this research, one researcher was responsible for the analysis and the other researchers, in this case instructors, supported the analytical process and categorization stages. To be able to present the content and structure of the formed concepts clearly and comprehensibly, a figure (see Publication III, p. 79) of the challenges experienced by the leaders was created. Elo et al. (2014) state that, for example, creating a figure can be a useful tool to get an overview of the entire result. As a final point in the evaluation of trustworthiness, one can consider how well the research results could be transferred to other similar contexts. At this point, it must be remembered that the results only apply to the target group of this study, but of course similarities in the values of millennial leaders, for example, could be found in other leaders, as this generation basically represents a certain era.

7 Conclusion

Most future leaders are millennial leaders (see also Eiffe, 2021) and thus, the better we understand their ideas about leadership, the better organizations and different communities can support them. The study showed that millennial leaders do not rely on their position and dominance-oriented interaction (see e.g., Van Vugt & Smith, 2019) but value continuous learning and self-reflection as well as open and equal dialogue in work communities. Millennial leaders see their supervisor as a sparring partner and supporter rather than a strong authority figure. It is then about the basics of humanity – respecting, listening, and appreciating other people.

Leadership appeared to them as a continuous opportunity that they believed they could develop towards their potential (see also Achor, 2018). In the growth of millennials, technology has been present an ever-increasing amount, and as a result, they have had to constantly learn and adapt to technological developments. Perhaps this can be one factor in why millennial leaders are characterized by a strong desire to learn and, on the other hand, also a demand. Millennial leaders' strong desire to develop and ownership of development confirm that organizations must ensure that suitable feedback and development methods and processes are in use. In this way, the necessary development options for leaders can be enabled.

The leadership of millennial workers has been widely researched, but research on millennial leadership itself is still scarce. This research brought out millennial leaders' ideas about leadership, which complements the research field of leadership, especially in the field of education. The results of the study provide concrete examples for the development of activities for leaders, for example, feedback as an important gateway to development, leadership role modelling, openness to self-reflection and discussions and coaching sessions with peers, as well as those interested in leadership and actors developing leadership. However, similar things can be observed in millennial leaders' thoughts about leadership, as in their thoughts about work in general. For example, Folarin (2021) has written about millennial leadership and states in his review that it is important to first understand the attitudes and behavior of millennials to create solutions that support their development in working life. He emphasizes that millennials should strive to give the big picture of things and that leaders need to help millennials find the “me” in the team. Finally, he noted that millennials must be mentored into career building behaviors (Folarin, 2021).

Wolor et al. (2021), on the other hand, aimed to identify effective leadership styles for millennials by looking at five leadership theories. Their results showed that a combination of various leadership styles is needed for meritorious leadership

and that millennial leadership contains features from them all. Farhan (2021), in his literature-based research, aimed to develop a leadership framework that engages the millennial workforce and resulting interaction between two relevant factors: leadership competences and the millennial workforce setting the basis for framework and tailoring management practices. In the findings of Meng et al. (2017), the millennial generation is described as contradictory, wanting independence, flexibility, and challenges balanced with clear expectations, regular evaluation and safety nets when facing failures. Lykins and Pace (2013) state that millennials seek learning experiences from workplaces, and Forbes (2023), on the other hand, claims that millennials want to be regularly evaluated in learning situations and want to advance quickly in their career. The millennial leaders of this study expressed similar ideas about leadership, emphasizing, for example, clear goals and expectations, flexibility, learning opportunities and the importance of feedback. It can therefore be stated that millennials' thoughts about work, and the values and thoughts attached to it, are closely connected to their thoughts about leadership and what kind of leadership they themselves want to be creating.

We can learn from the stories of the millennial leaders in this research and use the information in education, training and working life. The millennial leaders' responses showed the importance of a positive attitude towards learning new things and coping with difficulties. Attitude education can be seen to play a significant role because a positive attitude and the desire to learn and develop oneself serve as a strong platform for millennial leaders' success and ability to deal with challenges.

My research provides a new way of approaching the millennial generation in working life. Leadership has been approached using the perspectives of positive psychology which brings new information about leadership work, focusing on developing as a leader and the perspectives of well-being and success. My research reinforces the notion that there are many paths to becoming a leader and, at the same time, shows that, for millennial leaders, positive interaction, training, and the value of encouragement received are essential in leadership development. Thus, when managing and supporting millennial leaders, these points should be considered so that their needs can be supported as well as possible. A framework should also be created for millennial leaders, for example, in the form of a versatile job description where they would have as many different role models as possible and actively receive feedback on their work. Furthermore, enabling the realization of humane leadership, the workload of millennial leaders should be viewed critically. Millennial leaders felt that they were successful when they had time to support their subordinates and therefore, they should be given enough time and resources. This may require, for example, a closer examination of the leader's job description.

Although my research did not contain any hypotheses, it was perhaps surprising how humane and basic things such as the importance of social skills, feedback and listening the leaders ended up talking about. In the end, the experience of success

consisted of very everyday things, such as a positive attitude towards work, well-being, and openness. At the same time, it was surprising and very encouraging to note that the optimal attitude and practice of the leaders supported them in challenging situations. This research result can be used to convey that attitude education in childhood can support the adoption of a positive attitude. Examining the challenges of leaders and how they are dealt with from the perspective of grit offered a new way to look at the challenges of working life and especially coping with them. This will hopefully encourage the designers of leadership training, for example, to think about the role of interest, practice, purpose, and hope in leadership training.

Each publication (I-III) already offers valuable information individually, but together they are intended to be more than the sum of their parts. With my research, I also want to stimulate discussion, for example, about how there can be different paths for leader development, which opens the possibility for leadership work to start at a wide variety of points. The successful leadership of millennial leaders appeared to be very humane, which I hope will encourage educators and representatives of education and working life actors to think about, for example, how and in what way self-leadership could be taught in education and training, to encourage being an active actor and support positive interaction and cooperation skills. Existing positive leadership theories provided a ground to analyze millennial leadership but eventually, the purpose was not to find out which framework millennial leadership fits the best (see also Rehn, 2008) but how to understand the nature and experiences of millennial leaders as the reality of work and leader development appears to them.

Next, I will examine possible future research ideas from the perspective of leadership research and the perspective of an educational scientist. It would be interesting from the perspective of leadership research to know what results from employees working in the municipal sector would look like, as this study focused on companies operating in the private sector. In addition, it should be noted that the leaders who participated in this study work in expert-level positions and thus, it would be interesting to hear the thoughts of, for example, the people working with manual labor. From the point of view of an educationalist, it would also be interesting to study the leaders of this study ten or fifteen years from now and ask them how leadership looks and feels. Are the leaders still as positive and willing to learn new things? What elements are associated with humanity and how have they further developed themselves as leaders? By interviewing the same people in a longitudinal study, it would be possible to find out how ideas about leadership have possibly changed or whether issues are thought about in the same way. In addition, in-depth interviews and ethnographic monitoring of leaders would contribute to discussion about the thoughts of millennials. This research also did not specifically investigate how the leaders' personal lives have possibly influenced their development and thoughts about leadership. Of course, the leaders raised these issues themselves,

but a deeper examination of them in this study was not possible and it could be one point for future research to focus on.

Additional research ideas could include studying the essence and success of leadership from the perspective of employees or stakeholders. For example, how do employees perceive a successful leader and what thoughts do stakeholders have about successful leadership or coping with the challenges? By expanding research in the field of successful leadership, for example, by utilizing the perspectives of responsible leadership, new perspectives could be found to support the success of companies without forgetting the well-being of employees. Doh and Quigley (2014) showed how responsible managers, with their inclusive and understanding activities considering the views of various stakeholders, can have a positive impact as supporters of decision-making. Otherwise, could studying millennial leadership from the perspective of co-creation bring new perspectives for leaders, employees, and stakeholders? Voorberg et al. (2015), in their systematic literature review, studied co-production, stating, for example, that new innovations are formed because of cooperation, but the results of the co-production process could be focused on more. A more multidimensional picture of successful leadership might also be produced by including several generations in the research.

The purpose of my research is relevant because it brings the voice of millennial leaders to the fore and thus, complements the field of leadership research by offering a new perspective of millennial leadership, especially in the light of positive psychology theories. I hope that my research provides useful and new information for everyone interested in leadership and millennial leadership, and leadership development in general.

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Appendix 1 Interview request

INTERVIEW REQUEST

Dear (*Name*),

I'm Salla Karima, a PHD candidate at University of Lapland. My work experience in the area of competence development has led me doing doctoral research about leadership experiences by Millennial leaders (Y-sukupolvi). That is why I am contacting you: you represent a leader of this generation. In addition, your organization is listed in the top of Great Place to Work 2020 rating in Finland which makes your experiences and voice valuable.

I would like to hear more about your leadership experiences and thoughts about leading a modern workplace. You are the best participant for this research. Being aware of your busy schedule, I would appreciate if you could find time for an interview. It will be a casual interview in which your experiences and viewpoints are at the center. You may choose the way we conduct the interview: we can meet face-to-face or via, e.g., Skype depending on your location and preference.

Your participation is voluntary, and all the data will be handled confidentially and anonymously; your identity will not be revealed at any phase of the research. The research data will be used only for research purposes and restored accordingly.

I hope that you would accept my invite and contact me latest by 27.2.2019, so we can schedule your interview. If you would like to know more of my research or if you have any questions or comments, kindly be in contact. I will be happy to give further information. My research is supervised by Professor Satu Uusiautti and Professor (emerita) Kaarina Määttä.

I would like to thank you for your support already beforehand.

Looking forward to your reply.

Best regards,

Salla Karima

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Responsible supervisors:

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Appendix 2 Haastattelupyyntökirje

HAASTATTELUPYYNTÖ

Hei (nimi),

Teen Lapin yliopistossa kasvatustieteen tohtorin tutkintoon liittyvää väitöskirjatutkimusta johtajuudesta. Jatko-opintoni ja työkokemukseni henkilöstön kehitystehtävissä ovat motivoineet minua tutkimaan ja ymmärtämään johtajuutta syvällisemmin.

Tutkin milleniaaleja (y-sukupolvi) johtajina. XX on menestynyt Great Place to Work 2019 -listauksessa, mikä tekee henkilöstönne asiantuntemuksesta erityisen merkittävää. ja siksi lähestyn Teitä. Työni ohjaajina toimivat professori Satu Uusiautti ja professori (emerita) Kaarina Määttä.

Haluaisin keskustella y-sukupolven (syntyneet 1979-) esimies- / johtaja-asemassa olevien kanssa johtajuudesta ja kuulla heidän ajatuksiasiaan sekä kokemuksiasiaan toimia johtajana nykyaikaisessa työyhteisössä. Yrityksenne on arvokas osallistuja tutkimukseeni ja täten lähestyn Teitä haastattelupyynnöllä.

Haastatteluun osallistuminen on vapaaehtoista ja kaikkia haastattelussa olevia tietoja käsitellään luottamuksellisesti. Henkilöllisyytenne ei paljastu missään tutkimuksen vaiheessa. Aineisto tallennetaan ja säilytetään vain tutkimuskäyttöön.

Toivon, että voisit auttaa minua haastattelupyyntöni ja ottaa yhteyttä 27.2.2019 mennessä jotta voimme sopia haastatteluajan. Haastattelu tehtäisiin maaliskuu- huhtikuussa joko tavaten tai esimerkiksi Skypen välityksellä. Toivon, että olette valmis jakamaan asiantuntemuksenne ja täten tukemaan aihealueeltaan tärkeää tutkimusta. Vastaan mielelläni lisäkysymyksiin.

Haluan kiittää Teitä yhteistyöstä jo ennakkoon ja toivon pikaista yhteydenottoanne.

Ystävällisesti,

Salla Karima

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Työn ohjaajat:

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Lapin Yliopisto

Appendix 3 Semi-structured interview template

Interview:

Date and place:

Interviewee:

Interviewer:

1) Introduction of study and interviewer:

- own background
- background and purpose of the study
- introduce how interviewees have been selected

2) Warming up:

- Interviewee background information: gender, age, education, working years in total, current position and previous positions

3) Characteristics of leadership and leadership experiences:

- Tell me about your path to become a leader.
- Describe main substances / events in your leadership path?
- What kind of values you have as a leader?
- What does leadership mean to you?
- How would you describe a good leader?
- Tell me about a situation where you have felt that you have succeeded? What kind of strengths you have as a leader?
- In what type of situations, you have felt that you have not succeeded? What are your weaknesses as a leader?
- What areas you would like to develop in your leadership?
- How do you do decisions as a leader? Tell me a real-life example of a decision-making situation.
- Describe your standard working day? What kind of activities it consists? Tell me real-life examples.

- Describe your standard working week/month? What kind of standard practises it involves? Tell me real-life examples.
- What kind of thoughts you go through during a day/week/month as a leader? How does it reflect/not reflect your way of doing?
- How does it feel to be a leader?
- What kind of expectations you have from your own manager/leader?

4) Leadership motivation and enthusiasm

- What is rewarding to you? Tell me a real-life situation when you felt that you have succeed as a leader?
- What kind of things/tasks/situations/projects etc. brings you pleasure of working?
- What does motivation mean to you?
- What motivates you?
- What does not motivate you?
- How do you know that you are motivated?
- How do you know if you are not motivated?
- How do you recognise motivation in your leadership?
- How do you motivate others?
- What makes you feel enthusiastic?
- What does not make you feel enthusiastic?
- Do you think that motivation can be developed? If so, how to do it?

5) Leadership challenges and how to cope with them

- Has there been any difficult situations when being a leader? If so, describe a real-life example. How did you manage it? What did you learn from it?
- How do you overcome challenging situations?
- Are there any areas where you would require support/help from others/upper management etc.? Tell me a real-life example.
- Describe how do you train your leadership skills?
- How do you overcome challenging situations? Tell me a real-life example.
- How do you know what skills you should develop?
- Are there any areas which you feel difficult to develop? If so, why?
- What activities/things helps you to manage in challenging situations?

6) Summary and ending the interview

- Would there be anything else you would like to tell/discuss? If so, what and why?
Do you have any questions or comments you would like to share?
- Thanking interviewee and closing.

Appendix 4 Puolistrukturoitu teemahaastattelurunko

Haastattelu:

Aika ja paikka:

Haastateltava:

Haastattelija:

1) Esittelyt:

- oma esittäytyminen
- tutkimuksen tarkoitus ja tavoite
- haastatteluvalintojen kertominen

2) Haastateltavan perustiedot:

- sukupuoli, ikä, koulutus, työvuodet, nykyinen ja edeltävät työtehtävät ja asema

3) Johtajuuden työn luonne ja johtajuuden kokemukset

- Kerro matkastasi johtajaksi.
- Mitkä tapahtumat/asiat ovat olleet merkittävänä osana johtajaksi kasvussa?
- Minkälaisia arvoja sinulla on johtajana?
- Mitä johtajuus sinulle merkitsee?
- Miten kuvailisit hyvää johtajaa?
- Kerro onnistumisista johtajana? Millaisissa tilanteissa koet onnistuneesi (konkreettisia esimerkkejä)? Mitkä ovat vahvuutesi johtajana?
- Millaisissa tilanteissa tai asioissa koet epäonnistumista johtajana (konkreettisia esimerkkejä?) Mitkä ovat heikkoutesi johtajana? Onko omissa toimintatavoissa tai -piirteissä jotain sellaista, jota haluaisit muuttaa)
- Mitä asioita/osa-alueita haluaisit kehittää?
- Miten teet päätöksiä? Kerro todellinen esimerkki päätöksentekotilanteesta.
- Kuvaile tyypillistä työpäivääsi. Minkälaisia tapahtumia se sisältää? Kerro todellisia esimerkkejä.
- Kuvaile tyypillistä työviikkoasia/työkuukauttasi. Minkälaisia tapahtumia se pitää sisällän. Kerro todellisia esimerkkejä.

- Minkälaisia johtajuuteen liittyviä ajatuksia käyt läpi päivittäin/viikoittain/kuukausittain? Miten ne vaikuttavat/ei vaikuta toimintaasi?
- Miltä tuntuu olla johtaja?
- Mitä odotuksia sinulla on omalta esimieheltäsi/johtajilta?

4) Johtajuuden motivaatio ja innostuvuus

- Mikä palkitsee sinua? Kerro todellinen esimerkki tilanteesta jossa tunsit onnistuneesi johtajana.
- Minkälaiset asiat/tehtävät/tilanteet/projektit ovat sinulle mielekkäitä?
- Mitä motivaatio sinulle merkitsee?
- Mikä motivoi sinua?
- Mikä ei motivoi sinua?
- Mistä tiedät että olet motivoitunut?
- Mistä tiedät ettet ole motivoitunut?
- Miten huomioit motiivoinnin johtajuudessa?
- Miten motivoit muita?
- Mistä innostut?
- Mistä et innostu?
- Voiko mielestäsi motivaatio kehittää? Jos voi, niin miten?

5) Johtajuuden haasteet ja niistä selviäminen

- Oletko johtajana ollut hankalissa tilanteissa? Jos olet, kerro todellinen esimerkki tilanteesta ja kuinka sen ratkaisit. Mitä opit siitä?
- Miten pääset yli hankalista tilanteista?
- Onko työssäsi sellaisia asioita/tilanteita, joihin tarvitset muiden johtajien/ylemmän johdon tukea? Kerro todellinen esimerkki.
- Miten selviydyt haasteista? Kerro todellinen esimerkki.
- Kuvaile miten kehität johtajuustaitojasi?
- Mistä tiedät/kuinka tunnistat mitä osa-alueita sinun tulee kehittää?
- Koetko jonkin osa-alueen vaikeaksi kehittää? Jos näin, miksi?
- Mikä/mitkä asiat auttavat sinua jaksamaan haastavissa tilanteissa?

6) Yhteenveto ja lopetus

- Haluaisitko puhua vielä jostakin lisää? Jos näin, mistä ja miksi? Olisiko sinulla kysymyksiä tai kommentteja liittyen keskusteluunne?
- Kiitosten jakaminen ja haastattelun lopetus.