

CHARTING NEW PATHS: EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF FOLLOWERSHIP  
PERSPECTIVES ON MILLENNIAL CAREER BEHAVIORS IN THE CHANGING  
UNIVERSITY WORKPLACE

by

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I give all glory and honor to God for without Him this would not be. Sir Isaac Newton, once said, “If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.” Newton was explaining that his ideas didn't come from him alone. He relied on the ideas of those who came before him. If we are to see farther than others, we, too, must stand on the shoulders of giants. Thank you to Darryl and Tami Stapleton for allowing me to stand on your shoulders. Without your love and support I would not be where I am today. To my dissertation chair, Dr. Christopher Rappazini, words cannot express my gratitude for your endless encouragement, support, and willingness to learn with me through this process. I could not have asked for a better chair. Thank you to my sisters (Diana and Sydney), my friends (Gabby, Naomi, and Cathy), the Director of the CLO Dr. Kyle Small, my dissertation committee, my gracious research participants, and all the wonderful professors working in and with the CLO. This journey has been remarkable.

## DEDICATION

Daddy, I love you.

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## ABSTRACT

Kimberly M. Stapleton

### CHARTING NEW PATHS: EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF FOLLOWERSHIP PERSPECTIVES ON MILLENNIAL CAREER BEHAVIORS IN THE CHANGING UNIVERSITY WORKPLACE

Under the direction of Dr. Christopher Rappazini

This dissertation will explore the attributes and application of the Reversing the Lens Approach (Shamir, 2007) to followership and its influence on career advancement strategies for millennials working at universities. The research will assess millennials as being born between 1980 and 1995 and currently working at universities in the southeast United States. This is a phenomenological study with an exploratory qualitative research design that seeks to uncover and understand to what extent millennials' roles as followers and their interactions with their leaders influence their career advancement strategies and what, if any, are the implications for their current institutions and higher education at large. Primary instruments for evaluation include a qualitative "Followership Pre-Interview Questionnaire" and a qualitative "Millennial Followership Interview." The research will rely on the frameworks of the Reversing the Lens Approach (Shamir, 2007) to followership, followership theory (Uhl-Bein et al., 2014), and Robert Kelley's (1992) followership typology framework. The outcome of this research will be an assessment of millennial attitudes toward followership in the workplace and their relationships with their leaders, defined career strategies, possible preemptive strategies for retention, and opportunities for further and continued research.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In contemporary organizations, the dynamics of leadership have evolved, recognizing the essential role of followers in shaping the overall effectiveness of leadership practices.

Followership, often overlooked in the shadow of leadership research, has emerged as a crucial aspect of organizational success, influencing employee engagement, performance, and career advancement. As the workplace undergoes significant transformations with the increasing presence of millennials, understanding how this generation perceives followership and its impact on their career advancement strategies becomes imperative.

Historically, power and influence generally trickle from the top down. Culturally, the landscape has shifted from authoritative control and command to shared governance and empowerment. Technologically, advances in communications have led to ease of access and information dissemination, greater self-expression, and expanded connection. These phenomena have contributed significantly to the paradigm shift in the relationship and interactions between leaders and their followers. Added to that is generational change. Millennials are more distrustful of individuals and institutions, more comfortable in the global and digital world, more self-reliant and outward-looking, and more entrepreneurial, inclined to "look for a different way forward" (Kellerman, 2021). Currently, millennials are the largest generation in the U.S. workforce today (Robinson, 2020).

The purpose of this research is to explore the potential benefits and implications of focusing on followership, particularly through the Reversing the Lens approach (Shamir, 2007), in the context of leadership in higher education. The Reversing the Lens approach offers a novel perspective on leadership, encouraging an examination of leadership from the viewpoint of

followers. This approach brings to light the significance of followers' perspectives, their roles in organizational dynamics, and their influence on leadership effectiveness. This study aims to examine the relationship between millennials and their work environments, and how this relationship may influence their career advancement strategies and organizational outcomes. While much of the literature has focused on leadership and its impact on followers, there is a gap in understanding how followership perspectives shape millennials' decisions, aspirations, and paths for professional growth within the academic workplace.

This research could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the leader-follower relationship, the dynamics of leadership processes, and the role of followers in organizational outcomes. It could contribute to more inclusive and effective leadership practices and support the development of both leaders and followers within organizations. Additionally, this research could provide insight into retention strategies for institutions of higher education looking to combat pandemic-driven voluntary employment departures, generally retain talent, and improve succession planning.

### *Background of the Study*

While leadership research has been a longstanding focal point, the significance of followership in shaping the effectiveness of leadership practices has gained recognition. Followers, as active participants in the leadership process, contribute significantly to organizational success and play a pivotal role in achieving collective goals. However, despite the growing interest in followership, there remains a research gap in understanding how millennials perceive followership and how this perspective influences their career advancement strategies within higher education institutions. The Reversing the Lens approach, a theoretical framework proposed by Shamir (2007), presents a unique perspective on leadership by placing followership



at the forefront of examination. By exploring leadership dynamics from the viewpoint of followers, this approach sheds light on followers' roles, contributions, and their interactions with leaders in shaping organizational outcomes.

This study aims to explore the influence of the Reversing the Lens approach (Shamir, 2007) to followership on career advancement strategies for millennials working at universities. By focusing on the specific context of higher education and the distinctive attributes of millennials, this research seeks to uncover how the Reversing the Lens approach (Shamir, 2007) influences followership dynamics, how millennials perceive their roles as followers, and how this perspective shapes their career decisions, especially advancement strategies.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Despite their significant presence in universities, millennials are notably underrepresented in the leadership process, which raises concerns about their limited engagement and participation in shaping institutional policies, decision-making, and future directions. Addressing this issue is crucial as it not only impacts the inclusivity and diversity of leadership perspectives but also influences the overall campus climate and the potential for innovative and student-centered approaches to higher education. A key characteristic of millennial followers is being change agents within the leader-follower relationship (Wesner & Miller, 2008), but they are seldom given the opportunity to show up in the leadership process in this role, causing them to look for career advancement elsewhere. Many leaders still operate from a leader-centric vantage point, often excluding or alienating their millennial followers, causing millennial workers to seek jobs outside their current companies and, in extreme cases, outside their current industries, especially for advancement (Hurwitz, 2018). Addressing the issue of decreasing millennial employment retention is crucial for higher education institutions to foster a diverse,

innovative, and dynamic workforce that can adapt to the ever-changing landscape of education and student needs. Instituting effective retention strategies, providing growth opportunities, and cultivating an inclusive and supportive work environment are essential steps in mitigating this problem (Farrell & Hurt, 2014).

### *History of the Problem*

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics in the United States, as of January 2022, the median number of years that wage and salary workers had been with their current employer was 4.1 years. A study conducted by LinkedIn in 2016 found that millennials changed jobs four times on average within the first ten years after graduating college. The "job hopping" trend has been observed among younger generations, including millennials and Generation Z, who tend to switch jobs more frequently compared to previous generations. A survey by Gallup in 2020 indicated that 21% of millennials reported changing jobs within the past year, which was higher than other generational groups. It is important to note that career longevity and job changes can vary significantly across industries and job roles within the university context. Some positions, such as tenured faculty, may have relatively lower job turnover rates compared to other roles, like administrative staff or adjunct faculty.

It is estimated that millennial turnover costs the U.S. economy \$30.5 billion annually (Gallup, 2022). Besides the obvious costs of turnover, like time and resources to hire and train new employees, there are also many hidden costs—for example, reductions in productivity, skill drain, missed opportunities for leadership development, and decreased morale for remaining employees. In addition to the costs previously listed turnover in higher education includes costs unique to the industry such as disruption in continuity and stability, impact on institutional culture, and reduced student experience. Frequent turnover can lead to a lack of continuity and

stability within departments or teams. This can affect the overall institutional culture and hinder long-term planning and development efforts. The departure of millennials who often bring diverse perspectives and new approaches can influence the organizational culture. A lack of generational diversity may lead to stagnation and resistance to change within the institution (Green et al., 2012). Lastly, millennial employees often have a better understanding of the needs and preferences of current students, as they belong to a similar demographic. When they leave, there might be a gap in understanding student needs, leading to potential mismatches between institutional services and student expectations.

#### *Current Status of the Problem*

A 2022 survey from the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) found that nearly 60% of employees were likely to look for employment elsewhere in the next year. The main concerns shared by higher education professionals in this survey were lack of advancement opportunities, the desire for promotion and more responsibility, and lack of meaningful work. Conversely, when millennials feel valued and appreciated, employers are typically rewarded with loyalty, passion, and enthusiastic work (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Millennials have the second highest rate of full-time employment at 54%, behind Generation X at 63%, but they also have the highest rates of unemployment and underemployment (Gallup, 2018). However, millennials increasingly see life and work as one and are drawn to companies that care about their individual well-being and encourage them to focus on their whole selves. Who millennials are as people matters. It matters in how they want to be treated in the workplace, how they choose jobs and organizations, and in their performance. When companies fail to understand and value the millennial mindset, they fail to create work environments that attract and retain millennials (Gallup, 2018).

Additionally, leadership is an influence process that can only be made possible by the relationship between leaders and followers. With that understanding in mind, leaders should be challenged to move away from leadership being an *I thing* and more of a *we thing* (Haslam & Reicher, 2016). Examining and playing to the strengths of a good leader-follower relationship considers all the dynamics within the relationship and uses them in the mutual influence process to achieve organizational outcomes.

### *Theory and Action Related to the Problem*

Some studies suggest that traditional leadership styles prevalent in higher education institutions may not align with the preferences and expectations of millennials (Barnes & Gearin, 2022). Millennials tend to value participative and collaborative leadership styles that promote inclusivity and opportunities for their involvement in decision-making processes (Gorman et al., 2004). Hence the need for a focus on followership within leadership practices. When these leadership styles are lacking, millennials may feel excluded and disengaged, leading to a higher likelihood of leaving their jobs. Millennials tend to seek work environments that align with their values and offer a sense of purpose and meaning in their roles (Wesner & Miller, 2008). If the organizational culture is not inclusive, innovative, or supportive of employee well-being, millennials may feel disconnected and seek employment elsewhere (Kleinhans et al., 2014). A lack of diversity and inclusivity in leadership positions within higher education institutions can create a perception of limited opportunities for millennials from diverse backgrounds to advance into leadership roles. This lack of representation may discourage millennials from envisioning a long-term career within the organization. Millennials place a high value on continuous learning and professional development (Wesner & Miller, 2008). Organizations that do not invest in training and growth opportunities may experience higher turnover among millennial employees

who seek organizations that prioritize their ongoing development. Millennials, as a digitally native generation, often appreciate opportunities to leverage technology and participate in innovative projects (Skiba & Barton, 2006). Institutions that do not embrace technological advancements or offer opportunities for creative problem-solving may struggle to retain millennial talent. Lastly, millennials often desire regular feedback and mentorship from their supervisors and leaders (Meister & Willyerd, 2010). Organizations that do not provide a supportive mentoring culture may find it challenging to retain millennials who seek guidance and career support.

To address the problem of millennials being excluded from the leadership process and leaving their jobs, higher education institutions may need to adapt their leadership styles, career advancement opportunities, organizational culture, and support mechanisms to better align with millennials' values and preferences. Creating an inclusive and supportive work environment that fosters career growth and development for millennials can contribute to higher retention rates and a more engaged workforce (Farrell & Hurt, 2014). There have been some actions taken to address technology, professional development, and mentoring and feedback in the changing landscape of higher education through program development (Brancato, 2003) to enhance learning and working environments and much of the literature focuses on enhancing leadership practices through developing the adaptive leadership style (Barnes & Gearin, 2022). However, little has been done with a focus on followers, their perceptions of these problems, follower influence, and follower-centric solutions.

#### *Need for Further Study of the Problem*

The need to study this problem further is essential for many reasons. Some of those reasons include filling the research gap, understanding millennials' perspectives, enhancing

leadership practices, promoting inclusivity and collaboration, advancing organizational outcomes, and adapting to changing workforce dynamics. As mentioned earlier, there is limited research and literature on followership practices and how followers contribute to the leadership process. Conducting further research in this area will contribute to filling this gap in the existing literature. Millennials constitute a sizable portion of the current workforce. Understanding how they perceive followership and its impact on their career decisions could provide valuable insights for effectively managing and developing this generation of employees (Farrell & Hurt, 2014). Incorporating followership perspectives could enhance leadership practices within universities. By recognizing the role of followers and understanding their needs and aspirations, leaders can create more inclusive and supportive environments, leading to improved organizational outcomes. Studying followership in the context of the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach could promote a more inclusive and collaborative workplace culture. By recognizing the value of diverse perspectives and contributions from followers, universities could create an environment that fosters creativity, innovation, and employee engagement.

Researching the influence of followership on millennials' career advancement strategies could ultimately lead to improved organizational outcomes. Engaged and motivated employees are more likely to contribute positively to the institution's success, leading to enhanced performance and overall productivity (Farrell & Hurt, 2014). Lastly, the nature of the workforce is continuously evolving, with millennials playing an increasingly significant role. By studying followership in the context of this generational shift, universities can adapt their leadership and career development practices to remain relevant and effective. The insights gained from this research can help higher education institutions create a supportive and empowering environment

that not only attracts and retains millennial employees but also maximizes their potential and contribution to the institution's success (Green et al., 2012).

### *Purpose of the Study*

This study aims to understand how millennials perceive and experience followership within the university context, how this approach influences their career decision-making processes, and how it shapes their strategies for professional growth and advancement. Multiple factors influence college and university turnover and career decisions for millennials. This research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of some of the variables involved in this occurrence by examining the work environment of colleges and universities and leader-follower relationships through a generational lens, specifically millennials. Through an exploration of the Reversing the Lens approach's effects on followership dynamics, this research seeks to provide insights that could contribute to the development of more inclusive and effective career advancement strategies for millennial employees in higher education institutions and strategies for leaders on how to retain millennial talent.

### *Research Questions*

Main Question: What is the influence of the Reversing the Lens approach (Shamir, 2007) to followership on the career advancement strategies of millennials employed at universities?

The guiding questions to be considered to support this research question include:

1. How do millennials perceive and interpret the Reversing the Lens approach in relation to their career aspirations and growth development within university environments?
2. What are the current avenues for career advancement in universities and do these pathways resonate with millennials?

3. What challenges do millennials encounter when implementing the Reversing the Lens approach in their career development efforts at universities?

With these research questions and an exploration of the existing literature, this study seeks to demonstrate the importance of followership in leadership. Additionally, the literature may help to uncover that followers can impact leaders and their ability to lead. In light of issues like The Great Resignation, staff shortages in higher education, and increased interest and attention on work-life balance, followers, their perceptions on how they affect the leadership process, and the career moves they make due to those factors are driving implications.

#### *Theoretical Framework*

The proposed framework for this study includes followership theory focusing on Shamir's (2007) Reversing the Lens approach and examining followership typologies as possible contributors to millennial followers' attitudes towards followership in leadership. These typologies include alienated followers, exemplary followers, passive followers, pragmatic followers, and conformist followers based on Robert Kelley's typologies from his book *The Power of Followership* (1992). Typologies of followers focus on various dimensions of follower traits (Northouse, 2021).

For so long, the thought has been that leaders are self-made rather than peer-made. Followership is a relationally based process that includes how followers and leaders interact to construct leadership and its outcomes (Uhl-Bein et al., 2014). The theoretical constructs of followership are followership characteristics, leader characteristics, followership and leadership behaviors, and followership outcomes. Variables for followership characteristics include follower traits, motivations, perceptions, and constructions. Variables for leader characteristics include leader power, perceptions, constructions, and leader effect. Variables for followership



outcomes include individual follower outcomes, individual leader outcomes, relationship outcomes, and leadership process outcomes. The followership framework is built on the leader-follower relationship, including their individual behaviors, their influence on each other, and process outcomes. The outcomes, in turn, can influence the follower, the leader, the leader-follower relationship, and the leadership process. Culture often focuses on leading rather than following, but followers are just as important, if not more so, than leaders (Kellerman, 2008). Leadership can be viewed as a shared process.

Reversing the Lens approach to followership extends beyond leader-centric approaches by considering how followers (subordinates) interact with leaders (managers) to influence both leader and relational outcomes (Shamir, 2007), millennials as change agents. This approach addresses three things (1) the impact of follower characteristics on follower behavior, (2) the impact of follower behavior on leader perception and behavior and vice versa, and (3) the impact of both followers and leaders on followership outcomes (Northouse, 2021). Reversing the Lens is essential for this research to understand if followers' personality traits relate to their work behaviors, i.e., do millennials exhibit generational characteristics that affect how they operate in the workplace or relate to their leaders? This also allows researchers to examine how followers' behaviors affect their leaders' behaviors and how the leader-follower relationship affects organizational outcomes. Without followers, there can be no leaders. This means that followers' behaviors are a vital component of the leadership process, and that leadership cannot be fully understood without an understanding of followership (Shamir, 2007).

### *Interpretive Framework*

Social construction is the interpretive framework that will be applied in analyzing the followership typologies for how leader behaviors influence/contribute to each follower type.

Social construction theory helps explain followership by highlighting how followership is not merely a passive role but is actively constructed and influenced by social and cultural contexts. Social construction theory posits that individuals and their behaviors are shaped by the social environment and the meanings attributed to roles, relationships, and actions within that environment (Carsten et al., 2010). In the context of followership, social construction theory emphasizes the following aspects:

1. **Role of Social Norms and Expectations:** Social construction theory suggests that followership roles and expectations are socially constructed and influenced by cultural norms, organizational dynamics, and leadership practices (Carsten et al., 2010). How followers are expected to behave, interact with leaders, and contribute to the organization is shaped by social expectations and historical patterns.

2. **Perceptions of Power and Authority:** Followership is closely tied to power and authority dynamics within social structures (Courpasson & Dany, 2003). Social construction theory recognizes that the perception of leaders' power and authority, as well as followers' responses to this power, are socially constructed and influenced by the context in which they operate.

3. **Influence of Organizational Culture:** Organizational culture plays a significant role in shaping followership behaviors and attitudes (Louis, 1980). Social construction theory highlights how shared beliefs, values, and norms within an organization influence how followers perceive their roles and contribute to the leadership process.

4. **Formation of Identity:** Social construction theory emphasizes how followers' identities are formed through their interactions with leaders and other followers. Followers' self-

concepts, roles, and sense of belonging within the organization are shaped by social interactions and the meanings attributed to their positions (Bresnen, 1995).

5.      **Socialization and Learning:** Social construction theory recognizes that followership is learned through socialization processes within the organization (Carsten et al., 2010). How individuals are socialized into their roles as followers, including learning about expected behaviors and communication patterns, is shaped by the social environment.

6.      **Negotiation of Roles:** Followership roles are not fixed but are subject to negotiation and reinterpretation within specific contexts. Social construction theory highlights how followers may negotiate their roles and contributions based on situational demands, personal values, and the expectations of their leaders and peers (Uhl-Bein & Pillai, 2007).

7.      **Interpersonal and Group Dynamics:** Social construction theory emphasizes the importance of interpersonal and group dynamics in followership. How followers interact with one another, collaborate, and respond to leadership influence is shaped by the social context and relational patterns (Bresnen, 1995).

Overall, social construction theory offers a framework for understanding followership as a socially embedded and dynamic phenomenon. It highlights that followership roles, behaviors, and attitudes are not predetermined but are continually constructed and negotiated through social interactions, cultural contexts, and organizational structures. This perspective encourages researchers and practitioners to recognize the active agency of followers in shaping their roles and contributions within the leadership process.

#### *Approach of the Study*

This research will be a phenomenological study to explore millennial experiences with a lack of inclusion in the leadership process and how that affects the decisions they make about

their careers. The research approach is a qualitative design employing the methods of a pre-interview questionnaire and in-person interviews for data collection and thematic analysis for data analysis and interpretation. Using a qualitative design will allow the researcher to explore and understand the millennial generation as followers and what that means to them, assessing their attitudes about followership, their work environment, their relationships with their leaders, and how these factors inform their career advancement strategies. Qualitative research questions inquire about the relationship among variables that the researcher seeks to know (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A qualitative approach is most ideal here for many reasons for example:

1. **In-Depth Exploration:** Qualitative methods allow for a detailed and in-depth exploration of the topic. This approach is well-suited for understanding the complex and nuanced experiences, perceptions, and strategies of millennials in their career advancement within the university context.

2. **Exploration of Individual Experiences:** Qualitative research enables researchers to capture the unique experiences and stories of individual millennials working at universities. This approach can shed light on the diverse factors that influence their career decisions and advancement strategies.

3. **Flexibility in Data Collection:** Qualitative methods offer flexibility in data collection, allowing researchers to use various techniques such as interviews and questionnaires. This flexibility accommodates the multifaceted nature of the research question and helps gather diverse perspectives.

4. **Contextual Factors:** Qualitative methods allow researchers to delve into the contextual factors unique to universities, such as organizational culture, leadership styles, and

opportunities for growth. Such factors play a crucial role in shaping millennials' career trajectories.

5. **Participant Empowerment:** In a qualitative study, participants have the opportunity to share their voices, experiences, and perspectives, which can empower them and contribute to their sense of agency in their career development.

### *Procedures*

A qualitative pre-interview questionnaire and qualitative interviews will be carried out with millennials working at universities. Participants for interviews will be invited to engage in a sit-down interview comprised of demographic and content questions. They will be asked to complete the pre-interview questionnaire before the formal interview. These instruments are designed to capture generational relevancy, attitudes toward and experiences with followership in the workplace, relationships with leaders, and career advancement strategies based on the participant's goals and workplace experiences. Everyone participating will have the exact same questions and number of questions on all instruments; there will be no variation.

### *Instruments*

The qualitative approach will utilize instruments in the form of a pre-interview questionnaire and in-person interviews. Interview participants will be chosen randomly by the researcher from a group that fits the demographic and professional parameters of the research study. The group will be numbered, and the lottery method will be employed to choose randomly. They will receive the pre-interview questionnaire upon participation agreement and signed consent form. The pre-interview questionnaire is adapted from Robert Kelley's Followership Questionnaire from his work *The Power of Followership* (1992). The questionnaire will consist of thirteen questions asking participants to use a scale of 1 to 5 (1 meaning rarely/not

important and 5 meaning always/very important) to indicate the extent to which each statement describes them and their behavior in that situation. Lastly, the interviews will consist of ten questions created by the researcher and will be voice-recorded for accuracy and data analysis.

### *Sampling*

For this study, non-probability sampling methods will be used to select the research population, and sampling will be performed in a layered fashion due to the specific population requirements of the study. First, a purposive sample will be used since individuals are being chosen for a specific quality relevant to this study, i.e., millennials and employed at a university. Next, convenience sampling will be used because this particular population is easily accessible to the researcher. Lastly, the sample will also be voluntary. Anyone who meets the criteria of the study can voluntarily take part in the study.

### *Data analysis and coding*

The data analysis will begin once all the pre-interview questionnaires and interviews have been completed. The pre-interview questionnaires will be interpreted based on a scale adapted from Robert Kelley's Followership Questionnaire: The Power of Followership (1992). This questionnaire will measure the participant's level of engagement in their role as a follower and level of independent thinking. The questionnaire will be scored; each score corresponds to a type, including the engagement score and the independent thinking score.

Thematic analysis will be used to interpret and analyze the interview results. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that involves reading through a data set (transcripts from in-person interviews) and identifying patterns in meaning across the data to derive themes. The process that will be used for this study is a seven-step process including familiarization, coding, theme generation, review, defining and naming themes, mapping and interpretation, and

reporting (Braun & Clarke, 2020). This method will be deductive in that some predetermined expected themes based on existing knowledge and the literature are coming to the data. A predefined set of codes will be assigned to the qualitative data set to capture areas of interest and themes from the literature as well as codes for unexpected information and miscellaneous themes which will help make sure themes are not missed.

The questionnaire scoring along with the themes from the interview results, will be used to determine the answer to the research question and if there are any defining characteristics that prove the purpose of this research study. This analysis will not only answer the research question but also aid in further identifying gaps in the literature and suggestions for further research.

#### *Significance of the Study*

The study complements and enhances current research efforts in the fields of followership, leadership, talent management, and organizational behavior. It addresses relevant topics, integrates innovative theoretical perspectives, and contributes to the understanding of followership dynamics in higher education institutions, making it compatible with the current research landscape as well as offering new insights. Overall, the significance of this research lies in its potential to inform human resource policies, talent management practices, and leadership development initiatives within universities. By uncovering the followership perspectives of millennials, this study aims to offer valuable insights that can facilitate the creation of more inclusive and effective career advancement strategies for this vital generation in the academic workplace.

#### *Uniqueness and Compatibility of the Research*

This study offers uniqueness compared to existing research in several ways. First, the study focuses on the Reversing the Lens approach to followership. While there is growing

research on followership and leadership in various contexts, this study specifically focuses on the Reversing the Lens approach proposed by Shamir (2007). The Reversing the Lens approach is a unique theoretical perspective that examines leadership from the viewpoint of followers, and its application in the context of millennials in higher education is relatively unexplored in the existing literature. Second, the study's exclusive focus on millennials employed in universities sets it apart from more generalized research on followership and leadership in other industries. By concentrating on a specific generation within the unique setting of higher education, the research addresses the distinct challenges and opportunities that millennials encounter in their career advancement journeys. Third, this study bridges the gap between followership research and career development studies. It explores how followership dynamics, particularly from the Reversing the Lens approach, intersect with millennials' career aspirations, choices, and progression within the university context. Fourth, Given the relatively limited exploration of followership and leadership theories in the specific context of higher education and millennials, this study contributes to the development of innovative knowledge. It adds to the evolving body of literature on followership in unique organizational settings and offers novel insights into understanding and fostering effective followership practices. Finally, the study's specific research questions and objectives tailored to millennials and the Reversing the Lens approach differentiate it from broader studies on leadership or followership. The focused and targeted approach helps uncover valuable insights in a particular area of interest.

This study shares significant compatibility with the existing research as well. The study complements the current research trend that recognizes the importance of followership in the overall leadership process. It addresses the gap in the literature by exploring how the Reversing the Lens approach influences followership dynamics among millennials in universities. The



study's focus on higher education institutions is compatible with the current interest in examining leadership and followership within specific organizational contexts. By exploring followership and career advancement strategies in universities, the research contributes to the understanding of leadership in the unique environment of higher education. The study's emphasis on the impact of followership on millennials' career advancement strategies aligns with the growing interest in how leadership practices influence employee career trajectories and organizational outcomes. As talent management and employee retention become critical concerns for organizations, the study's exploration of how the Reversing the Lens approach influences career advancement decisions can provide valuable insights for higher education institutions seeking to retain and nurture millennial talent. And lastly, the study's investigation into followership and career advancement strategies contributes to the current focus on inclusivity and employee engagement in the workplace. Understanding how followership dynamics influence career decisions could help organizations create more inclusive and engaging work environments.

#### *Contribution to Knowledge, Theory, and Practice*

Higher education today is contending with the long-term effects of the global Covid-19 Pandemic, one of which being the Great Resignation, increased scandal among administrators, and faculty and staff leaving the higher education industry altogether. Median faculty and staff turnover, including full and part-time positions, in 2021 was 48% compared to 2019's 22.5% (CUPA-HR, 2022). Allegations of misconduct and scandal have led to the firings and resignations of many university presidents and administrators in 2021 and 2022, including University of Michigan's Mark Schlissel (Nietzel, 2022), University of South Carolina's Bob Caslen (Miller, 2021), San Jose State's Mary Papazian (Burt, 2021), University of Phoenix's George Burnett (Quintana, 2022), and Roxbury Community College's Valerie Roberson

(MacNeill, 2021), a list that is nowhere near exhaustive. University scandal by leaders and administrators not only places a strain on the university's reputation but creates mistrust among employees (Khan et al., 2019). When employees feel they cannot trust leadership, they feel unsafe, causing them to spend more energy on self-preservation, leading to increased time spent job hunting rather than performing their duties. Talent acquisition and employee turnover costs increase, which estimates put between 150%-200% of the employee's salary (Span, 2020). Increased turnover rates, increasing talent acquisition costs, and a shrinking applicant pool do not bode well for colleges and universities. Retention efforts are more important than ever.

While there has been a growing focus on followership research and its importance in the leadership process, there are still several gaps that exist in understanding how followers contribute to leadership. Some of these gaps include:

1. **The Role of Followers in Leadership Emergence:** While there is considerable research on leadership emergence and the characteristics of effective leaders, there is less exploration of how followers contribute to the emergence of leaders within a group or organization (Uhl-Bein & Pillai, 2007). Understanding followers' influence on leadership selection and emergence can provide valuable insights into leadership development processes.

2. **Followership in Leadership Succession:** Leadership succession is a critical phase for organizations, and followers play a crucial role in this process (Ballinger et al., 2009). However, there is limited research on how followers' expectations, preferences, and behaviors impact leadership succession decisions and outcomes.

3. **Follower Agency and Influence:** While followership research has highlighted the impact of leadership on followers, there is less emphasis on understanding the agency and influence of followers in shaping leadership behaviors and outcomes. Exploring how followers

actively influence leadership processes can provide a more balanced view of the leader-follower relationship (Shamir, 2007).

4. **Temporal Aspects of Followership:** Most followership research has focused on the present state of followership, but there is a lack of longitudinal studies examining how followers' attitudes, behaviors, and contributions change over time in response to leadership dynamics and organizational changes (Bluedorn & Jaussi, 2008).

5. **Follower Contributions to Leadership Development:** Followers can provide critical feedback and support for leader development. However, research on how followers contribute to leader development and growth is still relatively limited (Uhl-Bein & Pillai, 2007).

6. **Negative Aspects of Followership:** While much of the followership research has explored positive contributions, there is a gap in understanding negative or dysfunctional followership behaviors and their impact on leadership effectiveness and organizational outcomes (Clements & Washbush, 1999).

7. **Followership in Non-Traditional Leadership Contexts:** Most followership research has focused on formal organizational settings. More research is needed to understand followership dynamics in non-traditional contexts, such as social movements, volunteer organizations, and virtual teams (Blom & Alvesson, 2014).

#### *Delimitations and Limitations of the Study*

Delimitations that have been set intentionally include focusing on the millennial generation, the university setting, and the choice of the Reversing the Lens approach. While there is much research about the characteristics of millennials and their subsequent impact on the workplace, there is minimal focus on the millennial higher education professional in the role of followers in the industry. Millennials are the up-and-coming generation making up the majority

of the current workforce (Robinson, 2020); when we speak about turnover, a large portion of that population is millennial workers. On the other end of the spectrum, millennials are the workers that are currently being recruited and retained. Millennials are career-building right now, so factors like retirement, mid-career change, and medical and disability concerns are nonissues.

A focus on the university setting or higher education profession was a narrowing factor as well as a phenomenological factor. We are seeing significant turnover within the higher education industry, and colleges and universities are struggling with employee shortages that are affecting operations like never before (Brantley & Shomaker, 2021). The university setting will lend some organizational context to this study. Lastly, choosing to solely focus on the Reversing the Lens approach was to highlight an attribute of the approach, followers as change agents (Shamir, 2007), and a defining characteristic of the millennial generation, millennials desiring to create change. The hope is that by concentrating on the Reversing the Lens approach and millennials' desire to create change, a common theme will emerge in the research findings correlating leader-follower relationships in the workplace with career goals for millennials.

The limitations of this study include time constraints of the participants and societal trends. Time constraints could affect the quality of responses for the in-person interviews, for example, if there is a time crunch or the participant is juggling multiple projects. Finally, current societal trends could skew responses to interview questions. With the current climate elevating ideas about employee wellness, burnout, and employer responsibility to work-life balance in light of an increase in remote work options, the pandemic, and the impacts of the Great Resignation, participants' responses may be influenced in ways they would not have been just two years earlier.

Data saturation could be a limitation of this design in that there is no one-size-fits-all method to reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Therefore, the approach to this design and sampling for this research will be thought of through data richness and thickness (Dibley, 2011). This study aims to have quality (richness) and quantity (thickness) as an approach to data saturation. Data saturation is reached when there is enough data to replicate the study (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012) when the ability to obtain new information is reached, and when further coding is no longer feasible (Guest et al., 2006). Overall, the research design and methodology contribute to being able to construct, complete, and interpret the data in a timely manner that honors the time and commitment of the participants and the researcher while maintaining the integrity and trustworthiness of the study.

#### *Assumptions*

It is important to acknowledge one significant assumption in this research, and that it is paradigmatic. The assumption is that millennials' worldviews (characteristics) relate to the work they do and how they do it, which in turn impacts the decisions they make. This research relies on the assumption that millennials' desire to create change contributes to their attitudes about being followers in their organizations, which impacts how they work and the decisions they make about their careers.

Other assumptions include that both questionnaire and interview questions will be answered honestly and truthfully. The study assumes that participants and researchers will adhere to ethical guidelines throughout the research process, including confidentiality and informed consent. The study assumes that the organizational climate in universities has an influence on followership dynamics and career advancement strategies, but it does not presuppose specific attributes of this climate. The study assumes that the selected research

instruments are valid measures for capturing the relevant constructs. The study assumes that the findings may have implications for other universities or millennial populations, but the extent of generalizability is yet to be determined. Lastly, the study assumes that understanding followership and career advancement strategies can potentially impact organizational outcomes, such as employee engagement and retention.

It is essential to recognize and explicitly state these assumptions in the dissertation to acknowledge their influence on the research process and findings. By acknowledging these assumptions, the researcher can be transparent about potential biases or limitations that may arise from these beliefs and contribute to a more robust and balanced interpretation of the study's results.

### *Parameters*

The parameters define the scope of the study and guide the research design, data collection, and analysis. In the context of the dissertation exploring the influence of the Reversing the Lens approach (Shamir, 2007) to followership on career advancement strategies for millennials working at universities, some of the key parameters include:

- **Population and Sample:** The study will focus on millennials employed in universities as the target population. The sample size and selection criteria for participants will be determined, ensuring it is manageable and representative of the millennial workforce in the university setting.
- **Geographical Scope:** The research will be limited to specific universities or a particular region to ensure practicality and feasibility in data collection.
- **Time Frame:** The study will specify the time period during which data will be collected and analyzed.

- **Data Collection Methods:** The parameters will outline the specific data collection methods to be used, such as interviews and questionnaires, which align with the research questions and objectives.
- **Ethical Considerations:** The study will adhere to ethical guidelines, ensuring the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality.
- **Impact and Generalizability:** The study will clearly state the intended impact and the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other universities or millennial populations.

By establishing these parameters, the research maintains its focus and ensures a systematic and comprehensive investigation of the specific research question while being mindful of practical constraints and ethical considerations.

#### *Definitions of Terms*

Important keywords or key terms in this study include followership theory, Reversing the Lens, follower, leader, employee turnover, career advancement, and millennial. Followership theory is a process whereby an individual or individuals accepts the influence of others to accomplish a common goal (Northouse, 2021). Followers can be defined by who they are and what they do; for the purposes of this study, a follower will be defined by who they are. Followers are subordinates who have less power, authority, and influence than their superiors and who, therefore, usually, but not invariably, fall into line (Kellerman, 2008). Reversing the lens is an approach to followership that first addresses the impact of followers' characteristics on followers' behaviors. Second, the impact of followers' behaviors on leaders' perceptions and behavior and the impact of the leaders' perceptions and behavior on followers' behaviors, and third, the effect of both followers and leaders on followership outcomes (Northouse, 2021). A

leader is defined as a person who leads or commands a group, organization, or country (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021). Employee turnover is defined as the rate at which employees leave a workforce and are replaced (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021). Career advancement is defined as the upward trajectory of a person's professional journey (University of St. Augustine, 2021). Lastly, this study defines millennials as anyone born between 1980 and 1995 (Pew Research Center, 2019).

### *Summary and Forecast*

The information here provides an introduction to the dissertation, focusing on the context, research problem, objectives, and significance of the study. The section begins by highlighting the increasing presence of millennials in the workforce, particularly within higher education institutions. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the career advancement strategies of millennials in this specific setting. The research problem is identified as the limited exploration of what is the influence of the Reversing the Lens approach (Shamir, 2007) to followership on the career advancement strategies of millennials employed at universities. This gap in the literature warrants investigation, as it can shed light on how millennials perceive followership, how this perspective influences their career aspirations, and how they navigate their professional growth within the higher education landscape.

The objectives of the study are outlined, including the exploration of millennials' perceptions of followership, the examination of the impact of the Reversing the Lens approach on their career advancement decisions, and the identification of strategies they employ to advance in their careers at universities. Furthermore, the significance of the research is underscored, as understanding the followership perspectives and career advancement strategies of millennials in universities could inform human resource policies, talent management, and



leadership development initiatives within higher education institutions. Additionally, the findings may contribute to the broader body of followership and career development literature, enhancing our knowledge of the evolving workplace dynamics in the millennial era.

The literature review will present an extensive review of the relevant literature on followership theories, the Reversing the Lens approach, career advancement strategies, and the specific challenges and opportunities millennials encounter in the university setting. Through this exploration, the study aspires to offer practical insights that support the professional growth and flourishing of millennials as they navigate their career journeys within the ever-changing landscape of higher education institutions. The literature review aims to establish a conceptual framework that informs the subsequent research design and data analysis in the methodology and research chapters, respectively.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review chapter delves into an extensive examination of existing scholarly research, theories, and empirical studies related to the focal points of this dissertation. In this section, we explore the concepts of followership, Shamir's (2007) Reversing the Lens approach, career advancement strategies, the culture and identity of institutions of higher education, and characteristics of the millennial generation. Followership, often overshadowed by leadership research, plays a crucial role in the dynamics of organizational success. By investigating the perspectives, behaviors, and contributions of followers, this literature review seeks to uncover the underlying factors that shape millennials' attitudes toward followership within higher education institutions.

Furthermore, the Reversing the Lens approach (Shamir, 2007) stands as a key framework for understanding leadership from the perspective of followers. This chapter will critically analyze this innovative approach, exploring its theoretical underpinnings, its application in various organizational contexts, and its potential impact on followers' career development paths in universities.

The review will also delve into the realm of career advancement strategies, investigating the multifaceted ways in which individuals navigate their professional growth and progression. By examining prior research on career advancement, this study aims to identify the factors that influence millennials' career decisions, their aspirations for growth, and their alignment with organizational objectives within the higher education landscape.

Moreover, given that millennials constitute a significant proportion of the current workforce, it is essential to recognize the distinctive challenges and opportunities they encounter in their career

journeys. This literature review will highlight the specific generational attributes, values, and expectations that shape millennials' experiences at work, as well as how these factors influence their career advancement choices. The insights garnered from this comprehensive review of the literature will serve as the foundational framework for the subsequent research, guiding the development of research questions, the selection of methodologies, and the interpretation of findings in the following chapters.

By bridging the gaps in the current body of knowledge and synthesizing relevant research, this literature review aims to offer valuable insights into how the Reversing the Lens approach to followership impacts millennials' career advancement strategies within the unique context of universities. In doing so, it strives to contribute to the understanding of leadership dynamics, followership perspectives, and career development in the millennial era, ultimately informing strategies to support and nurture the professional growth of this vital generation in the academic workplace.

### *Organization of Review*

The purpose of this study was to understand how millennials perceive and experience followership within the university context, how this approach influences their career decision-making processes, and how it shapes their strategies for professional growth and advancement.

Main research question:

What is the influence of the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach to followership on the career advancement strategies of millennials employed at universities?

Guiding questions:

1. How do millennials perceive and interpret the Reversing the Lens approach in relation to their career aspirations and growth development within university environments?

2. What are the current avenues for career advancement in universities and do these pathways resonate with millennials?

3. What challenges do millennials encounter when implementing the Reversing the Lens approach in their career development efforts at universities?

This chapter reviews literature addressing research and theory related to the study in the areas of followership theory, Shamir's (2007) Reversing the Lens approach, the millennial generation, culture and identity in institutions of higher education, and career advancement strategies. A summary analysis of prominent themes and findings within the reviewed literature is presented at the end of the chapter.

### *Theoretical Framework*

#### *Review of Research and Theory about Followership Theory*

Followership theory in leadership is relatively new. Follett (1949) first approached an interest in follower activities as they relate to leadership through organizational management; the research then started to pick up first by Zaleznik (1965) as he examined followers and following or subordinates and subordinacy, and then again with Kelley (1988, 1992) follower typology, Meindl (1995) the romance of leadership as a follower-centric theory, and Chaleff (1995) the courageous follower. Traditionally there has been a leader-centric focus to leadership studies and practice as if the leader is solely responsible for change. Furthermore, there has been little research that has conceptualized the leadership process as shared, involving both the leader and followers in a shared relationship. A basic assumption of followership is that leadership cannot be fully understood without considering how followers and followership contribute to or detract from the leadership process (Carsten et al., 2010). The leadership process signifies a connectionist view that sees leadership as a system involving leaders or leading and followers or

following interacting together (Lord & Brown, 2001). This definition identifies followership in two ways followership as a position or role and followership as a social process, both of which will be discussed in a later section of this review.

Followership is a relationally based process that includes how followers and leaders interact to construct leadership and its outcomes. In an effort to offer a clearer theory of followership Uhl-Bein et al. (2014) define followership and outline the theoretical constructs of followership, followership characteristics, leader characteristics, followership and leadership behaviors, and followership outcomes in their research agenda. For a construct to be classified as followership it must be conceptualized and operationalized. Followership constructs consist of followership characteristics, followership behaviors, and followership outcomes. The variables for followership characteristics include follower traits, motivations, perceptions, and constructions. The variables for leader characteristics include leader power, perceptions, constructions, and leader affect. And lastly, the variables for followership outcomes include individual follower outcomes, individual leader outcomes, relationship outcomes, and leadership process outcomes. The followership framework is built on the leader-follower relationship, including their individual behaviors, the influences they have on each other, and process outcomes. The outcomes, in turn, can influence the follower, the leader, the leader-follower relationship, and the leadership process.

Uhl-Bein et al. (2014) distinctly reinforce that followership theory is not the study of leadership from the follower perspective. It is the study of how followers view and enact following behaviors in relation to leaders. Variables considered for leadership research are not necessarily suited for followership. The variables selected are so because they consider

the unique context and questions associated with followership. Therefore, followership research cannot mirror or seek to replicate leadership research. Through the research, Uhl-Bein et. al (2014) offer two frameworks for the study of followership the role-based approach or reversing the lens and the constructionist approach. The role-based approach highlights how followers affect followership outcomes through both follower characteristics and behaviors, leader perceptions and behaviors, and work unit levels. We will investigate Shamir's (2007) Reversing the Lens approach in the next section.

The constructionist approach involves leaders and followers interacting together to co-construct leadership and followership as well as their outcomes. In the constructionist approach, the primary question of interest for followership is what characterizes following behaviors, and how following behaviors work with leading behaviors to construct leadership and its outcomes. Both approaches are consistent with and support the emerging ideas on followership.

Uhl-Bein et al. (2014) offer the following benefits of followership theory: a move beyond leader-centric views to recognize the importance of followers in the leadership process contributes to a distributed leadership process, a focus on identifying the level of effectiveness in followership behaviors, it recognizes that leadership can flow in all directions not just top-down, allows for more understanding of non-effective leadership, and a call for followership development not just leadership development.

Carsten et al. (2010) discuss the social constructions of followership as it pertains to how individuals construct their roles as followers, followership schemas, and the contextual influences on both. They offer that focusing on followership helps increase our understanding of the leadership process by adding to current typologies and descriptions of

follower styles and behaviors. This perspective helps reverse the lens (Shamir, 2007) in leadership research by addressing the role that followers play in creating and maintaining both followership and leadership outcomes. The social construction perspective asserts that individuals create and interpret reality as they interact with their environments (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Individuals are socialized to construct norms for thinking, feeling, and behaving. Social constructions in organizations are best explained by the interaction between social schema and information processing influenced by contextual attributes relevant to the constructor (Weick, 1993).

Followership schemas are generalized knowledge structures that develop over time through socialization and interaction with the environment (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Organizations may influence these schemas by setting norms and standards of behavior for individuals in different hierarchical roles and then reinforcing those standards (Louis, 1980). There is evidence to suggest that we are socialized to view such hierarchical systems in terms of status inequalities and power differentials (Bacharach et al., 1995, Ravlin & Thomas, 2005, Biggart & Hamilton, 1984) leading to inferences that followers are less responsible, accountable, and effectual than leaders, which reinforces the view that followership is defined by obedience, deference, and powerlessness (Courpasson and Dany, 2003, Pearce & Manz (2005), Wortman, 1982). Research on upward communication in organizations suggests that followers often refrain from transmitting negative information due to their perceived vulnerability and lack of power (Glauser, 1984). Whereas some findings support the notion that followership schema is passive in nature there is also reason to believe that followers could hold more proactive schemas in which they believe their role is to engage in the leadership process more (Chaleff, 1995). Followers who hold such views

may believe that leadership is achieved through mutual influence (Greene, 1975), see their roles as partners with leaders (Uhl-Bein et al., 2000), co-producers of leadership (Shamir, 2007), or co-leaders (Heenan & Bennis, 1999). Research findings that support this idea include studies showing followers using upward influence to obtain needed resources, speaking up with ideas and solutions to problems, and challenging the status quo for the good of the organization (Allen & Porter, 1983, Van Dyne & Lepine, 1998, Morrison & Phelps, 1999).

While followership schema is one variable of the social construction of followership much can be said for organizational context's role in socially constructing followership as well. The context with which an individual operates will influence not only how they socially construct their role but also how they enact that role. There are a number of different variables that make up organizational context. The two elements of focus here are organizational climate and leadership style. These two elements may play the most important role in followership constructions that are more passive or proactive in nature. For example, organizations that maintain a tight hierarchical structure creating a climate of top-down decision-making can stifle innovation and personal initiative (Blau, 1968). Such contexts reinforce the notion that leaders are more competent and capable than followers, allowing little opportunity for followers to make a substantial contribution to the leadership process. Followers with more proactive schemas may find themselves socially constructing their roles around the degree of proactivity acceptable in their organizations. However, this can lead to these followers becoming frustrated with organizations that leave little opportunity for contribution which may force them into modifying their definition of



followership to fit into the boundaries their organizations have created (J. Berger et al., 2002).

In contrast, there are empowerment climates and organizational contexts that encourage a more participative environment. Research suggests that organizations with empowerment climates can positively influence job satisfaction and performance by sharing power and information among all organizational members (Seibert et al., 2004). Leader behavior likely plays a significant role in these contexts either encouraging or discouraging followers' behaviors. In an empowering climate leaders might encourage more participation from followers through power sharing which grants autonomy and intrinsic motivation (Spreitzer & Doneson, 2005) allowing for increased efficacy and better performance (Srivastava et al., 2006).

#### *Review of Research and Theory about the Reversing the Lens approach*

The Reversing the Lens approach to followership, as proposed by Shamir in 2007, is a theoretical framework that challenges traditional notions of leadership and followership by shifting the focus from the leader to the followers. This approach suggests that effective leadership involves not only understanding the behaviors and traits of leaders but also comprehending the perspective, needs, and behaviors of followers. The emphasis under this approach is on followers as change agents. This approach addresses three things (1) the impact of follower characteristics on follower behavior, (2) the impact of follower behavior on leader perception and behavior and vice versa, and (3) the impact of both followers and leaders on followership outcomes (Northouse, 2021).

Shamir argues that followers should not be seen as passive recipients of leadership but as active participants who contribute to the leadership process. This approach encourages leaders to

view followers as valuable assets with insights, creativity, and contributions that can significantly impact the success of leadership initiatives and organizational outcomes. Rather than viewing leaders as the entities that cause outcomes, this approach focuses on followers' characteristics and behaviors as causal agents of outcomes.

The Reversing the Lens approach emphasizes the importance of creating an inclusive and supportive environment where followers feel empowered to express their perspectives, voice concerns, and collaborate with leaders. By understanding followers' needs, aspirations, and expectations, leaders can create strategies and initiatives that resonate with their followers and lead to more effective leadership outcomes. Without followers, there can be no leaders. This means that followers' behaviors are a vital component of the leadership process and that leadership cannot be fully understood without an understanding of followership. Shamir (2007) presents the Reversing the Lens approach to followership as a significant departure from conventional leadership paradigms. This approach seeks to reshape how we perceive and understand leadership dynamics by advocating for a more comprehensive examination of the roles of leaders and followers within the organizational context. The Reversing the Lens approach challenges traditional hierarchical views of leadership and underscores the importance of acknowledging followers' contributions. It encourages a shift towards more inclusive, collaborative, and dynamic leadership practices that leverage the strengths of both leaders and followers for organizational success.

Shamir (2007) demonstrates the importance of the Reversing the Lens approach in several ways including understanding the shift in perspective, mutual influence, empowerment and collaboration, its contribution to followership, the idea of leaders as followers and followers as leaders, and the organizational climate. The core premise of the Reversing the Lens approach

is to reverse the traditional focus solely on leaders and redirect attention to the followers. This shift in perspective acknowledges that followers are not passive recipients but active contributors to the leadership process. Leadership is a dynamic and mutually influential process between leaders and followers. Rather than a one-way flow of influence from leaders to followers, the approach recognizes that followers can impact leaders' decisions and behaviors. Reversing the Lens underscores the value of empowering followers and involving them in decision-making processes. This inclusivity fosters a culture of collaboration, where followers' diverse insights and ideas contribute to innovative problem-solving and decision-making. The approach highlights that effective followership is not just about obedience or compliance. Followers bring their expertise, creativity, and commitment to the table, contributing to organizational success through their unique contributions. The Reversing the Lens approach blurs the traditional boundaries between leaders and followers. It acknowledges that leaders can also be followers in certain contexts, and followers can exhibit leadership behaviors when necessary. Lastly, Shamir's approach emphasizes that the organizational climate plays a crucial role in enabling the Reversing the Lens perspective. An environment that encourages open communication, mutual respect, and shared decision-making is more conducive to embracing this approach.

Overall, the Reversing the Lens approach challenges the traditional top-down perspective of leadership and calls for a more holistic understanding of leadership dynamics by considering the viewpoints and contributions of followers. It highlights the mutual influence between leaders and followers, ultimately contributing to more collaborative and successful leadership practices.

Carsten et al. (2010) expound on this approach by focusing on the factors that influence how followers construct their roles, the various follower roles and orientations that exist, and how leadership and organizational contexts impact these constructions. Followership

characteristics are important drivers for how followership is enacted at both the individual and group levels. Uhl-Bein et al. (2014) include in their framework that in addition to understanding how followers construct their roles there are different ways in which these roles can be enacted much of which is consistent with follower typologies. From the Reversing the Lens perspective these behaviors are a product of the follower interacting with their leaders and such behaviors can enhance or detract from the leadership process and in some cases overthrow it altogether. Alternatively, followers may engage in behaviors that neither help nor harm the leader, i.e. disengagement or they just passively accept whatever the leader hands down, i.e. obedience. The various followership behaviors can produce different outcomes depending on the leader, the context, and organizational goals.

Followership outcomes result from followership characteristics and behaviors in the leadership process. These outcomes can occur at different levels including the individual leader, individual follower, the relationship level (between the leader and follower), and the work unit level. For example, follower motivation and energy can affect leaders at the individual level which can influence leaders in how they use power and influence tactics (Uhl-Bein et al., 2014). At the relationship level followership behaviors can affect the level of trust leaders have in their followers. Lastly, at the work unit level followership behaviors can impact decision-making, ethical conduct, and even the organization's ability to adapt.

Uhl-Bein et al. (2014) point out in their research that these outcomes begin to explore the leader side by examining how leaders are affected by followers. They argue that exploring the leader side makes sense in today's climate where demands of leaders are more challenging due to the changing landscape of follower power in the workplace. They also assert this is essential in many cases where leaders inherit their followers and must do additional work to either break or

change the influence and pattern of behaviors the followers had in relation to their old leader.

Reversing the Lens calls into focus leaders as recipients of follower behaviors since under this approach follower behaviors are treated as causal agents.

An important distinction needs to be made between Shamir’s (2007) Reversing the Lens approach and the co-created leadership process mentioned by Uhl-Bein et al. (2014). The Reversing the Lens approach and the co-created leadership process share similarities in their emphasis on collaboration between leaders and followers in the leadership process. However, they differ in their specific focuses and the depth of their conceptualizations.

Table 2.1

Framework Comparison

	Reversing the Lens Approach (Shamir, 2007)	Co-Created Leadership Process (Uhl-Bein et al., 2014)
Focus	Primarily emphasizes shifting the perspective from a leader-centric view to a more balanced view that includes the active roles of followers.	Goes a step further by exploring how leaders and followers collaboratively construct leadership experiences.
Core Idea	Followers are not passive recipients of leadership but actively contribute to the leadership dynamic and its outcomes.	Leadership is an outcome of joint efforts, where leaders and followers co-create meaning, roles, and processes.
Primary Objective	Challenge the traditional top-down understanding of leadership and recognize followers as co-producers of leadership processes.	To study the intricate dynamics between leaders and followers in the process of constructing leadership, considering how their interactions shape the leadership narrative.
Implication	Emphasizes the need to study and understand the interactions, behaviors, and motivations of both leaders and followers in leadership situations.	Encourages investigating how leaders and followers collectively shape leadership by negotiating meanings, roles, and actions in real-time.

By understanding what the Reversing the Lens approach to followership is, leaders can apply it to their leadership practice. This can be done in several ways including active listening,

empowerment, recognition and acknowledgment, feedback loop, collaborative decision-making, encouraging innovation, mentorship and development, open communication channels, and rotating leadership roles. The research points to many practical ways to incorporate this approach into one's leading practice and the potential benefits. In implementing the Reversing the Lens approach leaders demonstrate that their followers' perspectives are valued and contribute to a more open and inclusive environment by actively listening to their ideas, concerns, and suggestions. (Shamir, 2007). Another facet of this approach suggests that leaders provide followers with opportunities to take on leadership roles and make decisions. Leaders empowering followers fosters a sense of ownership and shared responsibility (Uhl-Bein et al., 2014). Another recommendation to practice this approach is by publicly recognizing and acknowledging the contributions of followers, this can be through verbal praise, awards, or highlighting their achievements. Establishing a feedback mechanism where followers can provide input on projects, processes, and even leadership style (Carsten et al., 2010) can ensure that leadership decisions align with the needs and expectations of followers. Involving followers in decision-making processes, especially those that directly impact their roles or the organization (Shamir, 2007) can show followers their insights can lead to more informed decisions. Encouraging followers to share innovative ideas and solutions shows that their creativity is valued and can contribute to the organization's growth. Offering mentorship to followers and aiding in their professional growth allows leaders to learn from their followers' fresh perspectives (Northouse, 2021). Establishing open lines of communication where followers can approach leaders with ideas, concerns, or feedback at any time encourages open communication and collaboration. Finally, occasionally rotating leadership responsibilities among team members allow different perspectives to be highlighted and encourage shared leadership (Shamir, 2007).

By incorporating these practices, leaders can effectively shift towards the Reversing the Lens approach, where leadership becomes a collaborative effort that draws on the strengths and insights of both leaders and followers.

Finally, we examine how one measures the outcomes of using the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach. Measuring the effects or outcomes of using the Reversing the Lens approach involves evaluating changes in various aspects of leadership dynamics and organizational culture, this can be done in several ways:

- Conducting surveys and gathering feedback from both leaders and followers (Martin et al., 2010). Asking about changes in communication, collaboration, and shared decision-making allows for comparison before and after implementing the Reversing the Lens approach.
- Measuring the increase in active participation of followers in team discussions, decision-making processes, and ideation sessions (Laine & Vaara, 2015). Tracking the number of innovative ideas generated by followers, as well as the successful implementation of these ideas.
- Monitoring changes in employee satisfaction and engagement scores. Engaged employees are more likely to actively contribute to leadership efforts (Attridge, 2009).
- Analyze whether there is a positive impact on employee retention. The Reversing the Lens approach can create a more empowering and inclusive work environment, reducing turnover (Shamir, 2007).
- Evaluating the success of projects initiated by both leaders and followers. Do this by measuring their impact, efficiency, and innovation.

- Analyze changes in communication patterns among leaders and followers (Carsten et al., 2010). Are there more open dialogues, increased information sharing, and enhanced transparency?
- Assess changes in team performance indicators. Collaboration and inclusive leadership often lead to better teamwork and achievement of collective goals (Uhl-Bein et al., 2014).
- Monitor changes in the overall organizational culture towards inclusivity, shared ownership, and mutual respect (Attridge, 2009). Collecting and analyzing data on these aspects over time will provide insights into the effectiveness of the Reversing the Lens approach and its impact on leadership dynamics and organizational outcomes.

#### *Review of Research and Theory about Career Advancement Strategies*

Despite extensive research on leadership characteristics, little attention has been paid to how individuals achieve upward advancement and organize and formulate their tactics on their ascendancy (Laud & Johnson, 2012). Many studies have explored pre-hire predictors of career advancement, but they do not examine the type and use of tactics and strategies used in career progression. Career success has also been an area of interest to researchers but what constitutes success spans a wide interpretation and various perspectives (Gunz & Heslin, 2005). Influences and impacts on career success come from a combination of personal motivations, subjective and objective criteria, and organizational context (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Some researchers have offered evidence that personality characteristics are strong determinants of career success. For example, a proactive personality and directed motivation will positively impact career advancement (Eby et al., 2003, Siebert et al., 2001). Additional research showed that if contextual factors are uncertain, the impact of proactive personality on career success will play a more



critical role (Boudreau et al.,2001). Thus, individuals may have more impact potentially over their circumstances than previously thought.

Shifts in career models have resulted from both environmental factors and shifts in employee attitudes toward work and life. Difficult financial conditions and economic lows coupled with longer life spans have impacted older workers causing an extension of working life and an aging workforce (Browning & Silver, 2008). There has been an increase in dual-income households as well as single-working parents. People are realizing the need for continuous education and development to remain competitive while also realizing organizations are becoming less capable of fulfilling their economic and psychological needs (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008). With organizations becoming less fulfilling, leaner, and flatter with limited upward advancement opportunities individuals are becoming more transactional in their actions with their employers, with less employees defining their identities through their organizations and growing more distant and less loyal (Laud & Johnson, 2012). Taking primary responsibility for personal needs and career advancement is becoming more paramount for those who have been disappointed by organizational practices.

More recent career models consider and expect multiple job moves, but encourage nonlinear job routes. Lateral or horizontal career movement requires functional diversity and multi-company/department experiences which all require highly comprehensive skills to facilitate career movement not just deeper job knowledge. These skills become even more essential where competition for advancement has been intensified by shrinking, flatter organizations.

Laud and Johnson (2012) conducted a study to examine the tactics individuals use when planning for career progression. Their research was an exploratory qualitative design utilizing

interviews conducted by MBA graduate students. They interviewed 187 respondents across 136 organizations from a variety of industries, some including government, education, non-profits, and the military. Position titles and categories of the respondents were varied as well to include CEOs, presidents, partners, directors, chancellors, principals, and commissioners. Both males and females were represented from educational levels from PhDs to bachelors. Respondents ranged in age from 22 to 65. The findings were a list of 15 tactic categories that respondents used for career success and advancement. Those 15 tactics were formed into four strategic groupings, foundation strategies, self-branding, being centered, and seizing opportunity.

Foundation strategies consisted of interpersonal, motivation, planning, and leadership style. The tactics here represent the individual's job orientation, capability to work with others, and leadership desire. The foundation strategies category was cited by the largest number of respondents indicating that these tactics were the most beneficial in their career advancement aspirations. Interpersonal was cited as most important to those already in leadership positions. There was a degree of careful planning and utilization of interpersonal skills to create relationships with subordinates. Motivation was the second-highest tactic among respondents. Respondents reported strong motivation for upward movement to their current position. The interviews demonstrated the powerful effect of motivation as a driver for career expansion and advancement activities. This contributed to the idea of taking the initiative to improve circumstances rather than maintain the status quo.

The self-branding category consisted of training/education, networking, reputation/integrity, politics, and confidence. This category contributes to the idea of branding oneself to set the individual apart from competitors. Training and education were the highest-scoring tactics in this category. Respondents discussed both direct and indirect benefits of

training and education in their interviews. Here the researchers noticed a slight difference between men and women where women held education in a higher regard to advancement than men did. Networking was the second-highest-scoring tactic. The most actively used strategy for networking was seeking a career sponsor. Some respondents reported how being a protégé enabled them to secure key leadership positions even without all the necessary qualifications and minimal experience. A number of respondents had a clear focus on acquiring a high-powered mentor or sponsor.

The being-centered category included risk-taking, balance, communication, and work quality. These tactics contribute to the well-being of the individual in terms of work-life balance. The findings here show respondents' development of self and self-control as a tempering effect in order to better sustain their level of competitiveness and risk without the threat of burnout. Risk-taking ranked first in this category with respondents citing activities like volunteering for difficult projects, seeking new relationships with leaders, and decision-making under uncertainty. Second to risk-taking was balance. The findings showed that respondents who have work-life balance are likely to demonstrate the qualities of ethics and courage in their organizations. The research could not draw a link between balance and organizational culture, but rather a more unbiased honest account of actual circumstances.

Lastly, the seizing opportunity category included luck and opportunity. Luck was defined as the identification of positive upward mobility situations that manifest themselves without planning and are generally outside the control of the individual. Opportunity was defined as successful career advancement based upon the individual's hard work, insight, planning, and execution over time. Both luck and opportunity rated the lowest of all 15 tactics. A large number

of respondents attributed some degree of luck as a factor in advancement but only with a combination of long-term hard work.

Overall, the purpose of the study was to identify and rank career tactics used by individuals who advanced in their organization into what are considered leadership roles. Additionally, the study sought to determine if the ranked tactics formed any significant grouping that would be of strategic use. The findings revealed 15 tactics and formed four distinct categories in the application of the tactics. The four groupings contribute to identifying the priority of approaches used for career progression. The findings contribute to the theoretical insights and further understanding of the thought processes of individuals and how they approach career advancement. This study offers practical implications in the areas of leadership development training, leadership counseling, and career strategy by offering that individuals may benefit from this typology in future career advancement considerations.

### *Review of Research and Theory about the Culture and Identity of Institutions of Higher Education*

Institutions of higher education have distinct cultures and identities that are shaped by a combination of historical, social, and academic factors. These cultures are complex and multifaceted, reflecting the values, beliefs, traditions, and practices that define each institution (Shugart, 2012). The academy has ancient beginnings. The name traces back to Plato's school of philosophy, founded approximately 385 BC at Akademia, a sanctuary of Athena, the goddess of wisdom and skill, north of Athens, Greece (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021). Institutions of higher education date back to the 17th century in the United States and there are nearly 4,000 colleges and universities in the U.S. alone (Moody, 2021).

Culture is expressed in many different ways by many different organizations, which can make it challenging to study. For the purpose of this review, we will use Schein's (2017) definition of culture which is defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. Theoretically, how to study institutional culture, we look to William Tierney (1988), who suggests an analytical framework for studying organizational cultures in higher education. The framework puts emphasis on environment, mission, socialization, information, strategy, and leadership. The two critical pieces for this research are socialization and leadership. The apparent limitation was that followers were left entirely out of this framework. However, the socialization part of the framework could be expanded and updated to include followers in order to adapt this framework into today's study of followership and its role in leadership practice.

Sanford Shugart (2012) provides a brief but comprehensive history of higher education and its institutions in order to better understand the role of culture and identity in its operations and organizational goals today. Higher education's initial purpose was the preservation and transmission of culture, taught through a combination of classical and theological education, and the pursuit of higher education was reserved for the wealthy. Those who completed each component of the curriculum were deemed bachelors, then masters, and so on called the monastic model, which is still in practice at today's colleges and universities. Other elements still alive in modern practice are the shape of academic terms, the roles and authority of professors, the issues of town and gown, and the unchanged nature of general education requirements. Much of the academic culture at colleges and universities have deep, even ancient roots.

Starting around the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the faculty role began to center around research. Students were expected to develop their own specialties, which eventually became known as majors. Here the idea of industry-sponsored research, the organization of academic departments, and lecture as the primary pedagogy started to take form. The first and most influential development in higher education in the United States came after World War II with the creation of the G.I. Bill. The G.I. Bill included components for low-interest home loans, expanded healthcare, and tuition and living expenses for those who wanted to attend college. More than 2.2 million veterans took advantage of the educational benefits, creating extraordinary demand and nearly overwhelming institutions' capacities (Shugart, 2012). Due to this phenomenon, we see the creation of massive college campuses with buildings for instruction as well as residential life. Women's colleges became co-educational, and teacher's colleges evolved into regional public universities. However, this was only the first wave of people anxious for a college education; eighteen years later, came the Baby Boomers.

In an effort to massify higher education, American policymakers sought to create the industrial model of higher education. Here we see the implementation of large lecture sections, adjunct faculty, preoccupation with enrollment and class size, and part-time and full-time instruction. Most importantly, this is where the basis of the business model every college and university is built on started. Enrollment growth became the most important way to measure institutional health.

Shugart shows the evolution of the higher education model over time to demonstrate some of the components that make up an institution's culture. Those components include traditions and history, academic values and mission, shared values and beliefs, local and global engagement, leadership and governance, and challenges and responses. The history of an

institution can strongly influence its culture. Long-standing traditions, events, and milestones contribute to a sense of identity and continuity. Institutions often celebrate their history through annual events, alumni engagement, and physical artifacts on campus. The academic mission of an institution, often outlined in its mission statement, plays a significant role in shaping its culture. Institutions prioritize certain academic disciplines, research areas, and teaching methodologies, which can contribute to the unique identity of the institution. Higher education institutions often have shared values that guide their actions and decisions. These values might include academic integrity, intellectual freedom, diversity and inclusion, community engagement, and social responsibility (Fluckiger, 2021). Higher education institutions contribute to the local and global communities in various ways. Institutions that prioritize community engagement, service-learning, and international collaborations develop a distinct identity centered on social responsibility and global citizenship (Fluckiger, 2021). The leadership style and governance structure of the institution influence its culture. Leadership that values shared decision-making and transparent communication can foster a more collaborative and inclusive environment. Lastly, how an institution responds to challenges, such as social issues or technological advancements, reflects its culture. Institutions that adapt to change while staying true to their core values demonstrate resilience and forward-thinking (Shugart, 2012).

The culture and identity of institutions of higher education are shaped by a complex interplay of influences. The combination of these influences forms the foundation upon which the institution's values, traditions, and identity are built. Each institution develops a unique culture that defines its character, distinguishes it from others, and influences the experiences of its members – students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Leadership plays an important role in communicating the culture and identity of institutions.

## *Review of Research and Theory about Characteristics of the Millennial Generation*

Millennials are the generation following Generation X and preceding Generation Z. Millennials are sometimes referred to as Generation Y. Members of a generation are people that grew up during a specific period of history with members experiencing the same significant historical or social events during periods of critical development (Farrell & Hurt, 2014). These experiences become the foundation for the characteristics and values of the generation, which distinguishes its members from members of other generations (Twenge et al., 2010). Some of these defining experiences and events for millennials include the collapse of major companies like Enron, TYCO, and Arthur Anderson due to ethical issues, the Columbine High School shootings, Desert Storm in Iraq, the 2001 terrorist attacks, and the resulting war on terror (Farrell & Hurt, 2014).

Millennials were born between 1980 and 1995. Members of this demographic cohort are known as millennials because the oldest became adults around the turn of the millennium. Authors William Strauss and Neil Howe, known for creating the Strauss–Howe generational theory, are widely credited with naming the millennials (Horovitz, 2012). It is important to note that millennials are a large and diverse group, and they cannot be easily homogenized; however, there are common characteristics that can enhance the understanding of millennials as a group. There are six defining characteristics of the millennial generation (1) they are multi-taskers, (2) they desire structure, (3) they are achievement-focused, (4) they are technologically savvy, (5) they are team-oriented, and (6) they seek attention and feedback (Farrell & Hurt, 2014). These six traits show the most coverage and discussion in the literature, insinuating validity. Millennials desire engagement, flexibility, and variety. They have a desire to be change agents (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Millennials behave as consumers of the workplace, weighing their



options and continually looking for roles and organizations that enable their best performance (Gallup, 2018).

Millennials tend to value participative and collaborative leadership styles that promote inclusivity and opportunities for their involvement in decision-making processes (Gorman et al., 2004). Millennials tend to seek work environments that align with their values and offer a sense of purpose and meaning in their roles (Wesner & Miller, 2008). If the organizational culture is not inclusive, innovative, or supportive of employee well-being, millennials may feel disconnected and seek employment elsewhere (Kleinhans et al., 2014). Millennials place a high value on continuous learning and professional development (Wesner & Miller, 2008) and are the most educated generation in the current workforce. Millennials, as a digitally native generation, often appreciate opportunities to leverage technology and participate in innovative projects (Skiba & Barton, 2006).

Hershatter & Epstein (2010) share insights on millennials in the workplace to include the characteristics that make this generation stand out from previous generations. Millennials' relationship with technology is a driver in generational differences and although millennials operate much differently than previous generations much of their actions are predicated on fulfillment and accomplishment two of their most well-known characteristics and values. Hershatter & Epstein (2010) argue that understanding these tendencies and preferences is paramount to the successful integration of millennials into an organization. Millennials crave fulfillment, accomplishment, and happiness, and believe this is achievable through work (Guillemette, 2009). Achievement is gained through work and happiness and fulfillment through work-life balance. Millennials view work as a continual

learning process and that one doesn't need every skill required to be successful. Treating work as a continual learning process allows for collaboration in order to reach the desired goals.

Acknowledgment and consideration of the characteristics of the millennial generation is especially important due to the perceived lack of company loyalty demonstrated by millennials (Wesner & Miller, 2008). If an organization is not meeting the needs of a millennial, that millennial will most likely not think twice about finding another organization that will meet those needs more effectively. Conversely, when millennials feel valued and appreciated, employers are typically rewarded with loyalty, passion, and enthusiastic work (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). In addition to millennials the number of generations in the workforce today stands at five, e.g. Silent, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z (Kelly, 2023). Managers and those in supervisory positions need to be cognizant of and prepared for issues related to interactions between the generations. Although this research focuses on the millennial generation, it is important to remember that the current workforce is multi-generational.

Possible considerations for the organizational climate in the multi-generational workplace include reframing human resources strategy to adopt a holistic lifecycle approach to employee development (Pritchard, 2008). In this approach, employees are not developed at one particular moment in time, i.e. orientation, during training, annual performance reviews, but rather the entire employee lifecycle is considered as each employee develops: beginning with recruitment and ending with separation. Adopting this approach to human resource strategy could aid in improving not only millennial retention and commitment but improving the broader organizational climate for all. Human resource strategy needs to become agile in a multi-generational workforce to accomplish different things for different generations. For example, whereas baby boomers may be content with annual performance reviews, millennials who value

and desire more constant feedback would be disappointed with this length of time. For millennials, project-based feedback may be more suitable.

Balancing and understanding the needs of each generation is paramount. However, when a greater majority of the workforce is comprised of millennials, cultivating a more focused and widespread understanding and prioritization of the millennial generation should be considered. It is clear that this generation will and has already greatly impacted organizations. In order for organizations to maximize the contributions of millennials, understand where this generation fits into the workforce, and create an organizational climate that is beneficial for all generations, understanding of the characteristics, tendencies, and needs of the millennial generation is essential (Farrell & Hurt, 2014).

#### *Summary of Findings and Themes within Reviewed Literature*

The above review of literature represents the theoretical framework related to the research questions addressed by the study. This final chapter section summarizes prominent themes and findings within the framework. This summarization will serve as a base for comparison of study findings to relevant literature in Chapter Five.

#### *Summary of Themes/Findings about Followership Theory*

##### *Theme/Finding: Typologies*

As mentioned earlier, followership theory is not the study of leadership from the follower perspective. It is the study of how followers view and enact following behaviors in relation to leaders. Follower behaviors contribute to follower typologies which is one way in which followers can be classified and understood. Typologies lend a hand in differentiating followers' roles in the leadership process and can assist leaders in communication efforts. By understanding where the follower is on the typology continuum, a leader can adapt their style to better relate to

the role of the follower and communicate more effectively (Kellerman, 2008). Type, behaviors, and characteristics have been running themes in followership theory, career advancement strategies, and the study of millennials.

Just like there are many different types of leaders, there are many different types of followers. There are several experts we can attribute follower typologies to, the Zelenik Typology, the Kelley Typology, The Chaleff Typology, and the Kellerman Typology (Northouse, 2021). Here we will be using the Kelley Typology. While Zelenik (1965) came first he focused on the personal characteristics of followers, whereas Kelley emphasizes the motivations of followers and follower behaviors. Kelley believes followers are enormously valuable to organizations and that the power of followers often goes unrecognized.

Robert Kelley's follower typologies are a framework that categorizes followers based on their behaviors, attitudes, and levels of engagement within an organization. Kelley first introduced these typologies in his article "In Praise of Followers" published in the Harvard Business Review in 1988. The typologies aim to provide a deeper understanding of the diverse roles followers play and how they contribute to the overall success of an organization. Kelley identified five follower typologies: Alienated, Passive, Conformist, Pragmatist, and Exemplary. Kelley frames follower styles on two axes independent critical thinking to dependent uncritical thinking and passive to active. Based on that continuum alienated followers think for themselves but put forth a lot of negative energy. They are disengaged and often critical of organizational leadership and tend to voice dissatisfaction but may not actively work towards solutions. Passive followers who Kelley refers to as sheep look to the leader for direction and motivation. They typically do what they are told without questioning or providing input and may not take initiative or show much engagement beyond their assigned tasks. Conformist followers are yes people.

They are agreeable and eager to please their superiors, likely to conform to authority and may suppress their own opinions to avoid conflict and are willing to execute tasks but may not provide independent or critical thinking. Pragmatist followers are focused on self-preservation; they are adaptable to change and skilled at navigating organizational politics and may not be fully committed to the organization's goals but are skilled at managing their own careers. Lastly, exemplary followers, sometimes called star followers are proactive, independent, and engaged followers. They demonstrate critical thinking, offer innovative ideas, and provide constructive feedback. Exemplary followers are committed to the organization's success and willing to challenge authority when necessary.

Kelley's typologies challenge the conventional view of followers as passive and subordinate individuals. Instead, the framework acknowledges the diversity of followers' roles and their potential to actively contribute to organizational success. Exemplary followers, in particular, align with the principles of proactive followership by being engaged, independent thinkers who help organizations achieve their goals. It is important to note that these typologies are not fixed categories but represent a continuum of follower behaviors. Followers may exhibit traits from multiple typologies depending on the context and their individual characteristics. Additionally, while Kelley's typologies provide valuable insights, other researchers have expanded on and refined the concept of followership, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of follower roles within organizations.

What do follower typologies tell us about followers? Northouse (2021) gives us four insights. First, follower typologies are the first step in identifying key followership variables which is integral to building theory. Second, typologies show the various ways in which followers have been characterized. Third, these typologies are not exhaustive, and the list will

mostly likely grow but they do show us commonalities among followers. Finally, typologies give followers labels in the leadership process which allows followers more visibility in the leadership process and can assist leaders with more effective communication and relationship building.

*Theme/Finding: Leadership Development in Followership*

Leadership development in the context of followership involves fostering skills, attitudes, and behaviors that enable individuals to effectively contribute as followers while also understanding the dynamics of leadership. This approach recognizes that effective followership is an essential component of overall organizational success. Incorporating leadership development within the followership framework fosters a well-rounded approach to individual and organizational growth. It recognizes that effective followers contribute to the success of leaders and the organization as a whole, ultimately enhancing the overall leadership ecosystem (Dopson et al., 2018).

Developing effective leaders is a multifaceted effort (Holt et al., 2018). What does leadership development look like in followership practices? It can start with cultivating follower self-awareness. Effective followership begins with self-awareness. Leadership development programs can help individuals understand their strengths, weaknesses, values, and how these factors influence their role as followers. This awareness enables individuals to make more conscious choices about their contributions. Leadership development in followership encourages active engagement, critical thinking, and effective communication. Leadership development encourages followers to actively engage in their roles. This involves being proactive in seeking opportunities, offering suggestions, and contributing innovative ideas to the organization. Effective followers are critical thinkers who question assumptions and explore alternative

viewpoints. We have explored critical thinking as a prominent identifier in followership typologies. Leadership development can include training in critical thinking skills, enabling followers to analyze situations, make informed decisions, and provide constructive feedback. Followership involves effective communication, both upward to leaders and horizontally with peers. Leadership development emphasizes communication skills, enabling followers to express their ideas clearly, listen actively, and engage in meaningful conversations.

Three related components concerning leadership development in followership speak directly to characteristics identified as fundamental to the millennial generation, team collaboration, initiative and ownership, and feedback and adaptability (Farrell & Hurt, 2014). Effective followers collaborate well with colleagues and their leaders. Leadership development programs might focus on building collaborative skills, conflict resolution, and teamwork, contributing to a positive work environment. Leadership development encourages followers to take initiative, assume ownership of tasks, and display a sense of responsibility for the organization's success. This involves going beyond assigned roles and contributing to the larger goals. Finally, followers who provide constructive feedback help improve organizational processes and outcomes. Leadership development emphasizes giving and receiving feedback and being adaptable in changing circumstances. Leadership development includes creating a feedback loop between leaders and followers. This allows followers to provide input on leadership practices and strategies, contributing to a more inclusive and responsive leadership style.

Lastly, leadership development in followership contributes to ethical decision-making, supportive leadership initiatives, influence and advocacy, and career development. Leadership development in followership includes discussions on ethical decision-making. Effective

followers consider the ethical implications of their actions and ensure they align with the organization's values. Followership involves supporting leadership initiatives and understanding the rationale behind decisions. Leadership development helps followers appreciate the broader organizational context and the challenges leaders face. Effective followers can influence decisions through well-reasoned advocacy. It is important to mention that follower advocacy, empowerment, and even follower resistance stem from a place of psychological safety within the leader-follower relationship. Psychological safety is a term popularized by Amy Edmondson, an American scholar of organizational learning, to describe a shared belief that a team is a safe place for interpersonal risk-taking. When employees feel comfortable sharing suggestions or challenging the status quo, they are more likely to innovate and adapt to change (Brassey et al., 2023). Leadership development may include training in negotiation skills and presenting arguments effectively to influence decisions. Finally, leadership development programs can help followers align their career goals with their contributions. This involves setting goals, seeking developmental opportunities, and actively managing their career trajectories.

In the evolving landscape of leadership and organizational dynamics, the concept of leadership development within followership offers a paradigm shift that challenges traditional hierarchies and amplifies the contributions of every individual. By recognizing that followers are not merely passive recipients but active agents of positive change, organizations can harness the power of diverse perspectives, collaborative endeavors, and innovative thinking. Leadership development within followership cultivates qualities such as critical thinking, initiative, ethical behavior, and adaptability, preparing individuals to excel in both follower and leadership roles. Embracing this approach fosters a holistic leadership ecosystem, where leaders and followers co-



create a synergistic environment that propels organizations toward success in an ever-changing world.

*Theme/Finding: Non-Following in Followership*

As we have discussed, followers are unique and distinct and comprise a myriad of roles in their organizations. Further still research has shown that follower's roles and behaviors are moving beyond the traditional views of followers as deferent, obedient, compliant, and directionless. Non-following in the context of followership refers to a behavior or approach where an individual within an organization does not conform to the traditional passive or subordinate role often associated with followers. Instead of simply adhering to the direction of leaders, non-followers actively engage in shaping their roles, influencing decisions, and contributing to the organization in unique and independent ways. This concept challenges the notion that followers are solely defined by their obedience or compliance to leaders. Followers exhibiting non-following behaviors can be a comment on the efficacy of certain leadership practices (Uhl-Bein et al., 2014).

Characteristics of non-following in followership might include constructive disagreement, risk-taking, and ethical stance. Non-followers are comfortable expressing dissenting opinions when they have concerns or differing viewpoints. They engage in constructive dialogue to contribute to well-rounded decision-making. Non-followers might be more willing to take calculated risks and explore innovative approaches even if they deviate from the norm. Non-followers might uphold strong ethical principles and challenge decisions that they perceive as ethically questionable. Uhl-Bein et al. (2014) discuss that non-following behaviors can be both passive and active. Resistance behaviors could be passive, such as ignoring or withdrawing (Tepper et al., 2001), which essentially negates a leading behavior attempt. Or

resistance behaviors could be more active, for example, when one person's (the manager) leading attempt is met with another's (the subordinate/follower) leading attempt, essentially constructing a power struggle (Bennett, 1988).

Non-following is a concept that challenges traditional notions of followership by recognizing that followers can be active, independent, and influential contributors within an organization. It encourages individuals to move beyond the passive role often associated with followers and embrace a more engaged and empowered approach to their roles. Additionally, non-following involves positive disruption. It encourages individuals to challenge the status quo, identify inefficiencies, and advocate for changes that improve organizational processes. Non-followers contribute to organizational learning. By questioning assumptions and experimenting with new ideas, they contribute to a culture of continuous improvement and learning. Non-following does not mean disregarding leadership. Instead, it emphasizes a balanced approach where followers collaborate with leaders, providing input and feedback to collectively drive the organization forward.

It is important to note that non-following is not about opposing authority or undermining leaders. Rather, it is a recognition that followers can contribute to an organization in diverse and dynamic ways that extend beyond traditional roles (Uhl-Bein et al., 2014). Non-followers contribute to a more engaged and collaborative organizational culture, fostering an environment where innovation, critical thinking, and proactive problem-solving are valued and encouraged. Non-following contributes to our understanding of why and how managers are not always effective leaders, for example, when they are not able to co-construct leadership with their followers. Lastly, the concept of non-following contributes to the call for followership development and not just leadership development. Non-following is about recognizing that

followers can be dynamic agents of positive change within an organization. It aligns with modern leadership approaches that value engagement, collaboration, and the diverse contributions of all members of the organization, regardless of their hierarchical positions.

*Summary of Themes/Findings about the Reversing the Lens approach*

*Theme/Finding: Follower Influence*

Follower influence within the Reversing the Lens approach to followership is a dynamic process where followers actively contribute to decision-making, innovation, and organizational change. This approach acknowledges that followers are not passive recipients of leadership but have the potential to shape the direction of the organization (Shamir, 2007). Within the Reversing the Lens framework follower influence could look like ideation and innovation, influence on organizational culture, participation in strategy development, advocacy for diversity and inclusion, partnership in learning design, contributions to resources allocation, a voice in organizational governance, and leadership feedback and development.

Followers are encouraged to generate new ideas and innovative solutions. Their perspectives often offer fresh insights that leaders might not have considered otherwise. Followers have the power to influence the organization's culture. Their behaviors, values, and feedback impact the way the institution operates and how relationships are nurtured. Followers participate in the development of institutional strategies. This involvement ensures that strategies address real-world challenges and leverage the collective wisdom of the organization (Laine & Vaara, 2015). Followers advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Their influence can lead to policies and practices that create a more inclusive work and learning environment. In educational settings, followers' influence extends to co-creating learning experiences. Their input shapes curricula, teaching methodologies, and assessment methods. Followers' perspectives influence

how resources are allocated. Their insights guide decisions about budgeting, investments, and resource distribution. Followers have a voice in organizational governance. They participate in committees, councils, and decision-making bodies that influence institutional policies. Lastly, followers provide feedback to leaders about their leadership styles and practices. This feedback helps leaders refine their approaches and become more effective (Martin et al., 2010).

Follower influence within the Reversing the Lens approach is a vital component of creating a collaborative and adaptive organizational culture. When followers are empowered to influence decisions and contribute their perspectives, the organization benefits from a wealth of insights that drive positive change and promote holistic success (Shuck, Rocco, & Albornoz, 2009). Follower influence is a multifaceted concept that reflects the capacity of followers to actively contribute to the decision-making, innovation, and overall direction of an organization (Tripathi, 2021). Incorporating follower influence into an organization's culture requires a shift in mindset, where leaders view followers as active participants in shaping the organization's journey (Shamir, 2007). When follower influence is valued and integrated, the result is a more resilient, adaptive, and collaborative institution that thrives in today's complex and rapidly changing world.

*Theme/Finding: Leader-Follower Dynamics: Influence, Power, and Engagement*

It follows that the dynamics of leadership are intimately and inextricably tied up with followership (Rosenau, 2004). Research shows that the quality of the leader-follower relationship is reliably linked to follower well-being and performance (Martin et al., 2010). The dynamics of the leader-follower interaction are often characterized as a relationship because the emphasis is placed on mutual influence. A good quality relationship between a leader and a follower is characterized by high trust, mutual influence, reciprocal liking, mutual disclosure of information,

responsiveness, synchronized plans and goals, support, and an appreciation of the relationship (Boyd & Taylor, 1998). The dynamics of the leader-follower relationship can be more complicated and not as reciprocal as Boyd and Taylor have laid out. Some of those attributes are power relations, the voluntariness of interactions, and goal instrumentality (Thomas et al., 2013). Leadership is an influence process that can only be made possible by the relationship between leaders and followers. Examining and playing to the strengths of a good leader-follower relationship takes into account all the dynamics within the relationship and uses them in the mutual influence process to achieve organizational outcomes.

What does influence, engagement, and power look like between a leader and follower in relation to the Reversing the Lens approach to followership? The core premise of the Reversing the Lens approach is to reverse the traditional focus solely on leaders and redirect attention to the followers. This shift in perspective acknowledges that followers are not passive recipients but active contributors to the leadership process (Shamir, 2007). Shamir's approach highlights that leadership is a dynamic and mutually influential process between leaders and followers. Rather than a one-way flow of influence from leaders to followers, the approach recognizes that followers can impact leaders' decisions and behaviors. Followers have the opportunity to influence decisions and advocate for ideas they believe in. Leaders consider this input, and followers play an active role in shaping organizational strategies. The dynamic between leaders and followers is adaptable to different situations. Both parties are agile in their approaches to meeting changing demands. The leader-follower dynamic is characterized by mutual respect. Leaders appreciate the expertise and contributions of their followers, while followers respect the authority and experience of their leaders.

Research on influence tactics shows that followers are intentional in their use of strategies to shape and define the behaviors of leaders. Once again, the scope of this research is limited in capacity because the focus is on managerial downward influence rather than upward influence. Upward influence and leadership construction in a leader-follower relationship bears importance from both a practical and theoretical perspective (Tripathi, 2021). From a practical perspective, empowering followers to be active sources of leadership rather than passive recipients as traditionally viewed, acknowledges that leadership can and is a co-creation that helps organizations rethink the leadership process and its relationship to strategy development and implementation. From a theoretical perspective, top-down leadership in organizations has focused on formally assigning hierarchical roles where leadership originates from leaders and followership originates from followers (Tripathi, 2021). However, within followership theories, these conventional views adhere to the role-based approach where leaders and followers are both active participants and co-construct the leadership, followership, and the outcomes. Here it becomes crucial to understand the relationship dynamics that contribute to upward influence and the understanding of socially co-constructed leadership.

A poll from Gallup shows that in 2021 only 34% of workers in the U.S. were engaged in their jobs. Leadership disengagement is rising due to a lack of clear expectations and encouraged development (Harter, 2022). Research shows that relationship development, workplace climate, and learning opportunities were central themes in improving employee engagement (Shuck, Rocco, & Albornoz, 2009). The benefits of engaged employees include increased employee loyalty, increased productivity, higher sales and profits, and improved organizational culture (Attridge, 2009). Involving employees in problem-solving within the organization contributes to a divestiture of power which allows employees to gain a sense of responsibility and pride in both

their daily jobs and situational contributions (Pasmore, Friedlander, 1982). Lack of engagement and inclusion in organizational change initiatives have been proven to inhibit production and implementation. These issues may be linked to the fundamentals about the nature of decision-making and who should be included.

Research points to disengagement and lack of participation as heavy variables in organizational strategy work. Laine & Vaara, (2015) spell out four perspectives on participation in strategy work: participation as a non-issue, participation as a part of strategy process dynamics, participation as produced in and through organizational practices, and participation as an issue of subjectivity. This review will focus on participation as a non-issue and participation as produced in and through organizational practices. Since participation in strategy work has traditionally only concerned top management, who participated in strategic practices was a non-issue. Thus, top managers are the strategists, mainly involving others in the implementation. This echoes traditional leadership views where the leadership process is centered on the leader rather than a shared process with followers. This perspective ignores the social and behavioral aspects of strategy-making and organizational hierarchy and design. Top managers may use interactions with middle managers during the decision-making process through discussions and meetings, but the integration of the middle manager and others is limited. However, research has shown that the integration of others, like middle managers, helps to develop strategic proactiveness and capability (Paroutis & Pettigrew, 2007). This extends further to processes influenced by organizational practices. For those who do involve others, past top leadership research shows how strategy is enacted in everyday practices and routines as well as micro-practices of sensemaking and sensegiving (Rouleau, 2005). The participation of other actors and organizational members demonstrates the cultural and contextual capabilities needed to shape

decision-making in many ways, such as to fit customer preferences or the needs of the organization's stakeholders.

In the context of followership, power dynamics between leaders and followers are characterized by a more balanced and collaborative relationship compared to traditional hierarchical structures. Followership challenges the traditional notion of leaders holding all the power and followers being subservient. Reversing the Lens allows leaders to empower their followers by giving them autonomy and responsibility within their roles. This empowerment enhances followers' sense of ownership and contribution (Sharmir, 2007). Followers have the power to influence change. Their suggestions and feedback can drive organizational improvements, demonstrating the significant role followers play. In this instance, power is viewed as collaborative rather than hierarchical. Leaders and followers collaborate to achieve shared goals, acknowledging the interdependence of their roles. Furthermore, leaders use their power to identify and cultivate leadership potential in followers, creating a pipeline for future leadership roles. The Reversing the Lens approach contributes to a sustainable leadership succession strategy. Followers are groomed for leadership roles, ensuring a smooth transition when leadership changes occur. Power dynamics in the leader-follower relationship within followership reflect a more egalitarian, collaborative, and empowerment-focused approach. This approach acknowledges the strengths and contributions of both leaders and followers, leading to a more balanced and effective organizational environment.

Thomas et al. (2013) speak to the social cognition in leader-follower relationships and the co-production of the leadership process. Tensions, struggle, and resistance can be productive to the leadership process as well. Opposition can challenge the collective thinking about a situation. Resistance between top and middle management can result in the co-production of strategic



initiatives. Sometimes pushback can facilitate reframing resulting in new and possibly better outcomes. Just as strategic initiatives are co-constructed, the co-construction of leadership employs active participation from both leaders and followers. Organizations should be mindful of the social influence dynamics in the process by recognizing how they may assume traditional viewpoints of leadership, which could be polarizing to followers in certain work contexts, teams, or organizations.

Leaders could change their fixed mindsets to foster followers' leadership capabilities by leveraging relationships conducive to follower-centric leadership through positive interactions and the reduced use of denial when the follower attempts to contribute to the leadership process in such ways. More importantly, both leaders and followers could consider thoughtfully creating balance and congeniality in this relationship by being aware of the nuances of the leader-follower relationship dynamic.

The leader-follower dynamic in followership embodies a shift from a traditional top-down structure to a collaborative partnership. This dynamic acknowledges that leadership is not confined to a single role but is distributed across individuals who collectively drive the organization forward. The Reversing the Lens approach has a transformative impact on the leader-follower dynamic by reshaping traditional power dynamics and fostering a more collaborative, reciprocal, and inclusive relationship. This approach, which emphasizes the importance of followership in leadership processes, influences how leaders and followers interact and collaborate (Shamir, 2007).

*Theme/Finding: The Role in Universities*

Applying the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach in universities involves reimagining the traditional dynamics between staff members and administrative leaders. This

approach emphasizes collaboration, mutual respect, and shared decision-making, leading to a more engaged and empowered workforce (Shamir, 2007). The core tenants of the Reversing the Lens approach that can be implemented here for a more engaged and empowered work environment include participatory decision-making, inclusive problem-solving, cross-departmental collaboration, feedback and continuous improvement, and co-creation of institutional goals. Decisions related to policies, procedures, and campus initiatives involve staff members' input. Their insights help shape changes that directly impact their work environment. Staff members are included in problem-solving discussions. This approach harnesses diverse perspectives and leads to comprehensive solutions. The Reversing the Lens approach encourages collaboration among different departments. Staff members share ideas and resources, fostering a sense of unity across the institution. Administrative leaders actively seek feedback from staff members to improve workplace processes, policies, and the overall work environment. Lastly, the Reversing the Lens approach involves staff members in the process of setting institutional goals, ensuring that they align with the needs and aspirations of all stakeholders.

This approach brings about a shift in perspective, where each group recognizes their roles as leaders and followers, and actively contributes to the institution's success. This can contribute to more shared governance and an inclusive campus culture. The opportunity for followers to participate in university governance bodies, contributing their insights to decisions related to institutional policies and academic programs. The Reversing the Lens approach focuses on inclusivity which can aid in fostering an inclusive campus culture. Different voices are heard, and diverse perspectives are celebrated in all aspects of university life. By adopting the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach, universities could create a more collaborative and inclusive work environment where staff members feel valued, engaged, and empowered, which

ultimately contributes to improved morale, productivity, and the overall success of the institution.

The Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach to followership aligns naturally with mentorship in higher education, creating a mutually beneficial relationship between mentors and mentees. This approach transforms the traditional mentorship dynamic into a collaborative partnership where both parties contribute to learning, growth, and leadership development (Zhang et al., 2023). This can be accomplished in several ways, through shared learning and two-way feedback, co-creation of goals, mutual growth, and inclusive mentorship. In the Reversing the Lens approach, mentors recognize that mentees bring valuable perspectives and insights. Mentorship becomes a platform for shared learning, where mentors also gain from the experiences and fresh viewpoints of their mentees. Mentorship becomes a two-way feedback exchange. Both mentors and mentees provide insights, allowing for well-rounded development and improvements for both parties. Instead of mentors solely setting goals for mentees, the Reversing the Lens approach encourages collaborative goal-setting. Mentees' aspirations and ideas contribute to defining their growth trajectory. The Reversing the Lens approach facilitates mutual growth. Both mentors and mentees evolve through the partnership, benefiting from exposure to new ideas and experiences. Finally, the Reversing the Lens approach promotes inclusive mentorship that crosses boundaries of age, gender, and hierarchy. Mentees of any background can provide unique insights to their mentors (Zhang et al., 2023).

Incorporating the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach into mentorship transforms it into a dynamic, empowering, and reciprocal process. This approach nurtures leadership potential, encourages collaboration, and prepares mentees to become effective leaders who can make a meaningful impact in higher education and beyond. The Reversing the Lens

approach is appropriate and beneficial across various areas in universities where leadership, collaboration, and the contributions of all members are valued.

### *Summary of Themes/Findings about Career Advancement Strategies*

#### *Theme/Finding: Millennial Values and Preferences*

We have established that millennials desire meaningful work, value innovation, collaboration, and feedback, and are technologically savvy (Farrell & Hurt, 2014). They seek employers who are aligned with their values and care about their holistic well-being. It is important to understand the characteristics of the millennial generation and how that affects the attributes they look for in an employer. These are drivers for talent management and retention (Pasko et al., 2020). Millennials are more attuned and sensitive to their surroundings and environment, and they are more engaged (Wingard, 2022). This alone makes events like the Great Resignation more poignant and impactful and forces leaders to view solutions differently. Systematic examination of millennials' career decision-making has been limited (AbouAssi et al., 2019). This speaks to the importance of understanding the behavior of this generation during an era of baby boomer retirement and millennials' growth as a share of the workforce. Millennials' tendency to frequently change employers—and, potentially, sectors of work—may bring some benefits to these organizations but can also be costly, complicating efforts to build a specialized workforce for many organizations.

As we examine the characteristics and preferences of millennials in the workforce, leaders should be asking themselves how do we incorporate these characteristics, values, and preferences into work environments and retention strategies to attract and maintain our millennial talent. Furthermore, the expected large number of retirements in public and nonprofit organizations (Cho & Lewis, 2012) in the next decade will leave a large void in the leadership of

these organizations. Millennials will eventually assume these leadership positions. This approaching generational transition underscores the importance of moving beyond assumptions toward a more rigorous examination of millennials' work preferences and patterns (AbouAssi et al., 2019).

Millennials, like any generation, have diverse needs and aspirations when it comes to their jobs (Rigoni & Adkins, 2016). However, certain values and preferences are often associated with millennials in the workforce. These values and preferences are drivers for the employers millennials choose but also factors for why millennials choose to leave those employers. The most common values and preferences of the millennial generation include meaningful work (Wesner & Miller, 2008), work-life balance, professional development, mentorship and feedback, collaboration, diversity, and inclusion (Gorman et al., 2004), technology (Skiba & Barton, 2006), and advancement pathways (Pasko et al., 2020). Millennials often seek work that has a positive impact on society or aligns with their values. They are more likely to stay engaged and committed when they feel their work has a purpose. A healthy work-life balance is highly important to millennials (Rainer & Rainer, 2011). They value time for personal pursuits, family, and leisure, and are more inclined to choose jobs that offer flexibility and promote well-being. Millennials are keen on continuous learning and growth. They want opportunities for skill development, career advancement, and training that enhances their expertise. Regular feedback and mentorship are valued by millennials. They seek guidance from experienced colleagues and appreciate constructive feedback for their professional growth (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Millennials thrive in collaborative work environments where they can share ideas, work on team projects, and engage in open communication with colleagues (Martin, 2005). Millennials value workplaces that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion. They want to work in environments

that respect and celebrate different backgrounds and perspectives. As a generation that grew up with technology, millennials often seek jobs where they can leverage modern tools and technologies to enhance their work efficiency. Finally, Millennials value clear career paths and opportunities for advancement (Bell & Griffin, 2013). They are more likely to stay in a job where they can see a trajectory for growth.

As baby boomers retire and leave the workforce, millennials will be counted on to fill the resultant worker gap. To close this gap, company managers must focus on providing millennials with their preferred work-related attributes in an effort to retain them (Pasko et al., 2020). These values and preferences can be operationalized to create robust strategies for recruitment, promotion, and retention. Some recruitment strategies may include showcasing work-life balance by highlighting flexible work arrangements, remote work options, and wellness initiatives in job postings and using language that promotes a healthy work-life balance (Pasko et al., 2020). Highlight professional development by describing the opportunities for skill enhancement, career growth, and mentorship that your organization offers. Additionally, promotes collaboration by highlighting collaborative projects, team-based work, and a supportive work environment where millennials can share their ideas and collaborate with colleagues. Lastly, highlight technological integration and promote advancement opportunities by focusing on the company's commitment to diversity and inclusion, provide examples of how it is reflected in the workplace, and showcase how the company embraces technology to enhance work processes.

Some retention strategies may include mentorship programs, creating a diverse and inclusive culture, giving regular feedback, wellness programs, leadership opportunities, and regular career conversations. Implementing mentorship programs can connect millennials with experienced colleagues who can guide their career growth. Creating and promoting initiatives

like workshops and celebrations of different cultures and backgrounds can foster a culture of diversity and inclusion. Establishing a feedback-rich culture where millennials receive constructive feedback and have open channels for communication can be another avenue to strengthen retention. Continuing to offer wellness programs, mental health support, and stress reduction initiatives contributes to a culture of holistic well-being, another characteristic important to maintaining millennial talent. Providing opportunities for millennials to lead projects, teams, or initiatives (Pasko et al., 2020) creates an environment where professional development is valued. Lastly, having ongoing career discussions as a retention strategy may help to understand millennials' aspirations and provide guidance on how they can achieve their goals within the organization. By integrating these strategies, organizations can attract and retain millennial talent by aligning with their values, needs, and aspirations (Pasko et al., 2020). The key is to create a workplace environment that empowers and engages millennials while fostering a sense of purpose and growth.

*Theme/Finding: Leadership Emergence*

Although there has been considerable academic focus and practical significance in identifying both informal and formal leaders within organizations, the development of a comprehensive framework for leadership emergence in the literature remains challenging. Having such a framework is crucial for progressing in this field, given its intricate nature and its expansion across various disciplines such as management, communication, education, and economics (Badura et al., 2022). Organizations spend billions of dollars each year on leadership-related efforts (SHRM, 2017). This includes efforts to develop and retain formal and informal leaders, however, organizations struggle to identify leaders and there is limited understanding of the factors that produce leaders.

What is leadership emergence? The definition of leadership emergence can vary widely, but there is a consensus that leadership emergence generally involves an individual coming to be viewed as influential by others (Lanaj & Hollenbeck, 2015). More specifically, Badura et al. (2022) suggest that leadership emergence encompasses the phenomenon of an individual becoming a leader within their team or organization regardless of the formality of the leadership role. Badura et al. (2022) do recognize two specific situations in which there may be conflict with this definition (1) cases in which leader emergence happens and it not acknowledged by all possible followers and (2) leadership emergence can involve an individual enacting the leadership role without externally accepting or claiming the leader identity. Leadership emergence can be both formal and informal, each manifesting in different ways and environments. Overall, leader emergence is a dynamic process that is relevant to both informal and formal leadership roles and will tend to involve perceptions, behaviors, and social interactions between the prospective leader and relevant others (DeRue & Ashford, 2010).

Badura et al. (2022) ask crucial questions in their study examining leadership emergence. They focus on what we already know about leadership emergence, what came before leadership emergence, what are the outcomes associated with leadership emergence, and what are the boundary conditions for leadership emergence. Question one, what do we know about leadership emergence? Badura et al. (2022) found that even though leadership phenomena have often been studied through a relational lens, research has yet to explicitly explore the social interactions and processes associated with leadership emergence. Research refers to leadership emergence in a relational nature because it involves social processes that generally entail the acknowledgment of the perspective leader as a leader (Day & Harrison, 2007). Prospective leaders whose traits and behaviors align with the behaviors and traits of prospective followers are more likely to be



granted the leader identity. Although, some research suggests that it is equally important for prospective leaders to claim the leader identity rather than waiting for follower recognition (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). This can be crucial in situations where informal leader emergence is dominant.

While acknowledging the social aspect of leader emergence, alternative approaches to comprehending this significant phenomenon have leaned more towards the leader's perspective, particularly in terms of how potential leaders interpret and establish their leadership roles. By adopting a narrative standpoint, Zheng et al. (2021) introduced four frames (being, engaging, performing, and accepting) that potential leaders utilize while navigating the emergence process. These perspectives enable potential leaders to comprehend, express, and embody their identity as leaders. Additionally, these perspectives assist potential leaders in comprehending and participating in identity formation, fostering a sense of consistency in their journey as leaders. Ultimately, these frames offer a set of behavioral guidelines as potential leaders step into their leadership roles and enact their responsibilities. Although this approach prioritizes the leader's viewpoint, it still acknowledges the crucial role of followers in conferring leadership and underscores the relational nature inherent in the emergence process.

Question two, what preceded leadership emergence? Badura et al. (2022) used two concepts to contribute to understanding the antecedents of leadership emergence. Those concepts are leadership effectiveness and the distal and proximal factors that contribute to work outcomes. Applying these two concepts leads to identifying five antecedents to leadership emergence (1) traits and characteristics (2) interpersonal attributes and task competence (3) motivation (4) behaviors and (5) attributions and relational associations. Traits and characteristics like demographic attributes facilitate others' perceptions that one can be characterized as a leader.

Leadership emergence research has incorporated five variables from this category with regularity including biological sex, race, age, tenure, and education. These traits tend to be relied on heavily in leader recognition and perception. Specific interpersonal attributes and task competencies that have been a focus for leadership emergence include the Big Five personality traits, cognitive ability, social intelligence, and positive self-concept traits. Badura et al. (2022) note that these attributes could serve casual applications in explaining who emerges as a leader. While there is not as much scholarship on motivation as a factor in leadership emergence as the previous two factors pre-existing, frameworks acknowledge the role of motivation in this process (Mann, 1959). Much of the discussion on motivation centers around power and achievement. Power as a motivator can be seen in both formal and informal leader emergence whereas achievement motivation is more common to informal leader emergence. Overall, a general desire or motivation to lead has been connected to both formal and informal leader emergence (Luria & Berson, 2013). Behaviors follow similar patterns to traits and characteristics in that the approach involves allowing one to be recognized as leaderlike (Kander, 1992). Lastly, attributions and relational associations like feelings of warmth and competence are beneficial to leader emergence and are mostly seen in instances of informal leadership emergence (DeRue et al., 2015).

Question three, what outcomes are associated with leader emergence? Here the focus is on formal versus informal leader emergence. Badura et al. (2022) do note that studies focused on the outcomes of leadership emergence are limited but initial findings suggest that informal leaders can influence team dynamics and performance. In particular, informal leaders strengthen social support among group members and the presence of informal leadership in team settings has more often than not contributed to effective team performance (Berson et al., 2006; Crozier

et al., 2017). Informal leaders' individual outcomes are generally positive. Informal leaders report being more satisfied at work (Özalp Türetgen et al., 2017), experiencing a higher degree of organizational commitment (Lim, 2011), and being seen as more effective performers (Berson et al., 2006). Evidence suggests that formal leadership emergence can result in higher levels of satisfaction (Barling & Weatherhead, 2016) and commitment at work (Bagdadli et al., 2006). Individual outcomes for formal leader emergence demonstrated higher salaries for formal leaders and a higher degree of overall well-being (Li et al., 2018).

Lastly, question four, what are the boundary conditions of leadership emergence? Some researchers have studied the boundary conditions of leadership emergence in relation to the presence or absence of certain factors or the degree of certain factors that may alter the relationships and outcomes of leadership emergence. Badura et al. (2022) found that the most common approach has involved looking at the moderating influence of individual attributes like core self-evaluation as a potential boundary condition. Research exploring boundary conditions looked at how groups or organizational factors influence emergence. Liu et al. (2018) found that the relationship between employee boundary-spanning behavior and informal leadership emergence is enhanced in the context of high-power distance. Furthermore, a group's trainer in leadership development programs can strengthen the relationship between informal leadership emergence and leader effectiveness. Research has also explored how the situation itself can contribute to who emerges as a leader. This research relies heavily on the individual possessing traits that are compatible with the task at hand or the needs of the organization (Barnlund, 1962).

Badura et al (2022) underscore their review with important implications both theoretical and practical. Here we will focus on the practical implications as the theoretical implications argue the importance for continued and deeper research. As mentioned earlier leadership

development is a multi-billion-dollar industry, yet this costly endeavor is yielding marginal returns. By showcasing factors that predispose individuals likely to emerge as leaders and shedding light on the process of emergence, Badura et al. (2022) provide an understanding of this phenomenon that will help facilitate leadership emergence and the success of those that will best contribute to the goals and well-being of the organization. Introducing the individual aspects, group influences, and contextual factors that can influence or hinder the emergence process helps current leaders understand the emergence process both formally and informally and can raise their effectiveness during the process.

*Theme/Finding: Overall Career Development*

At their current stage in life, millennials fundamentally think about their role as a stepping-stone and a growth opportunity, but they also want to feel deeply committed to their role and to work for a manager who will invest in their development, which isn't entirely different from what other generations value (Rigoni & Adkins, 2016). Research shows that having a great manager and being part of a great management culture is important to all employees. However, millennials place a greater emphasis on opportunities to learn and grow and opportunities for advancement. Developing a professional career is regarded as a means to address both the requests of the employees and of the organization, as opposed to the old strategies that only address the institutional needs (Palade, 2010). The objective of career development is the professionalization of individuals and their personal wellbeing, as well as the well-being of the organizations.

As with leadership theories, there are many career development theories of which two will be the focus here, Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad, and Herma's theory (1951) and Donald Super's theory (1990). These two theories illustrate the evolution of career development and

almost mirror generational differences in the process. Ginzberg et al. (1951) postulate that career choice is a function of human development over time. An individual passes through three stages of career development that correspond to the human development stages the fantasy stage (birth-11 years old), the tentative stage (11-17 years old), and the realistic stage (17-24 years old). In the fantasy stage, children begin to pretend and mimic the adults around them. In the tentative stage, children begin to understand their personal preferences, talents, and aptitudes as they become more self-aware. Finally, in the realistic stage young adults begin to narrow in on a career choice. This stage is divided into three sub-stages: exploration, crystallization, and specification. During exploration young adults begin experiencing possible career choices through educational choices and exposure to different careers. During the crystallization stage, young adults become more certain of their career choice as exposure is prolonged, and finally, during the specification stage specific specialties are introduced within each career choice. Ginzberg's (1951) theory aligns with the developmental stages of growth and personality development. While it makes sense that normal personality development would influence career development, Ginzberg did not consider developmental changes that take place throughout a person's life. Decision-making and development continue past the age of twenty-four, which is the end of Ginzberg's realistic stage.

Super (1990) influenced the idea that developing a sense of self and realizing that you change over time is important when planning your career. According to Super, self-concept changes over time and develops through experience. As such, career development is lifelong. Super used Ginzberg's theory to expand the life and career development stages from three to five with different sub-stages. Super's five life and career development stages include the growth stage (birth-14 years old), exploration stage (15-24 years old), establishment stage (25-44 years

old), maintenance stage (45-64 years old), and the decline stage (65+). The development of self-concept, attitudes, needs, and the general world of work are forming in the growth stage. The exploration stage is the “trying out” stage through hobbies and educational opportunities. The establishment stage is where entry-level skills are built, and stabilization takes place through work experience. The maintenance stage involves continual adjustments to improve, and finally, the decline stage is where output starts reducing and retirement is on its way.

Super argues that occupational preferences and competencies, along with an individual's life situations, all change with time and experience. Super developed the concept of vocational maturity, which may or may not correspond to chronological age: people cycle through each of these stages when they go through career transitions. Super states that in making a vocational choice, individuals are expressing their self-concept, or understanding of self, which evolves over time. People seek career satisfaction through work roles in which they can express themselves and further implement and develop their self-concept.

Career planning and development in an organization is an evaluation process of the development opportunities within the organization and alignment with the personal aspirations of the employee. This process can be very beneficial to both the organization and the employee. This is advantageous to the organization in that it can attract top talent, reduce turnover, engage employees, and create a pipeline for succession (Palade, 2010). Advantages offered to the employee include the possibility to advance faster, increased autonomy, wider breadth of experience, and increased job satisfaction (Palade, 2010).

Key aspects of professional career development include skill enhancement, continuous learning, networking, mentoring and coaching, work-life balance, and feedback seeking. All of these aspects align with the preferences and characteristics of the millennial generation, that is

career building and taking over the workforce. Professional career development is a dynamic process that requires self-awareness, dedication, and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. It empowers individuals to take charge of their career trajectories and strive for meaningful and fulfilling professional lives.

*Summary of Themes/Findings about The Culture and Identity of Institutions of Higher Education*

*Theme/Finding: Succession Planning*

Succession planning is a strategic process that extends beyond identifying potential leaders; it encompasses the thoughtful cultivation of a leadership pipeline to ensure organizational stability, growth, and adaptability (SHRM, 2023). It requires a forward-thinking approach that anticipates leadership needs, identifies high-potential individuals, and prepares them for future responsibilities. Colleges and universities have been slow to embrace corporate America's approach to formal succession planning for their leadership (Witt/Kieffer, 2008). Based on the conceptual framework of Henri Fayol (1841-1925), one of the first to study succession planning, highlights the need for succession planning in stabilizing the workforce (Collins & Collins, 2007). It addresses as part of this framework, building a diverse pipeline of leadership to create management redundancy and stability and discusses leadership preparation for this segment by means of mentoring, coaching, and leadership development.

Estedadi et al. (2015) argue the importance of succession planning by explaining the gaps left in employment by older generations retiring and how this affects higher education just like other industries. They state that baby boomers are retiring and leaving gaps in organizations. Boomers are employed at all levels of organizations from front-line positions all the way to executives. The gaps left by those retiring impact all sectors from business and health care to education and government. Succession planning and management have been used by industries

to address these gaps by developing internal talent to fill potential leadership and administrative openings. Higher education is not immune to this phenomenon. Compounding this loss of talent is the knowledge that the skill set required of an academic leader today is much different from the skill set required of academic leaders 40 years ago. In addition to skills related to curriculum development and assessment, teaching and learning, employee management, student and parent engagement, and strategic planning and budgeting, added skills are required in the areas of public relations and collaboration, globalization, and securing alternative funding through grants and fundraising.

Followership plays a crucial role in succession planning within organizations, including colleges and universities. While succession planning often focuses on identifying and preparing future leaders, effective followers are integral to this process as they contribute to the overall leadership ecosystem (Golden, 2014). Effective followers can serve as a talent pool for future leaders. Organizations can identify followers who exhibit leadership potential, such as those who demonstrate initiative, critical thinking, and collaboration, and provide them with opportunities for leadership development. Followers who have experience working closely with current leaders can offer valuable insights and perspectives to potential successors. They can serve as mentors, sharing their knowledge and helping successors navigate the organizational landscape. Followers who actively engage with leaders often build networks that extend beyond their immediate roles. These networks can connect potential successors with valuable resources, mentorship, and opportunities. Followers who closely interact with leaders might identify gaps in leadership, such as skill deficiencies or areas where the organization requires fresh perspectives. This information can guide succession planning strategies. Lastly, by recognizing and nurturing effective



followers, organizations can create a pipeline for leadership succession. This ensures a continuous flow of talent ready to step into leadership roles when the need arises.

Succession planning is not just preparing for a successor, but also developing successors from within (Golden, 2014). In a rapidly evolving professional landscape, organizations that prioritize succession planning safeguard their future success. By nurturing leadership potential, promoting diversity, and fostering a culture of continuous development, they ensure that capable and adaptive leaders are ready to steer the organization toward its future goals. Incorporating followership into succession planning recognizes that leadership is a collaborative effort involving both leaders and followers. By acknowledging the value of effective followers and their potential to become future leaders, organizations may create a more comprehensive and sustainable succession planning strategy.

*Theme/Finding: Challenges to and Opportunities for Change*

In today's rapidly changing educational landscape, colleges and universities face a multitude of challenges and opportunities. These factors shape the way institutions operate, educate students, and contribute to society. Furthermore, higher education institutions often have a complexity brought about by the competing internal cultures and structures and the variety of external stakeholders that exert a pull on the institution's resources and attention. Some of the current challenges facing higher education today are adaptation, financial sustainability, diversity and inclusion, employee engagement and development, and crisis management.

Educational institutions must adapt to rapid changes in technology, pedagogy, and student expectations. Leaders need to foster a culture of innovation and flexibility to stay ahead. Leaders must navigate financial challenges, including declining enrollments, reduced funding, and increasing costs. Developing sustainable financial models is crucial. Creating an inclusive

campus environment requires leadership commitment, addressing issues of bias, fostering a sense of belonging, and ensuring equitable access to opportunities. Leaders must support employee development, provide opportunities for research and growth, and facilitate a positive work environment to ensure quality education. Lastly, crisis management is most apparent now since both challenges and opportunities were exposed by the Covid-19 global pandemic. Educational institutions are susceptible to various crises, such as health emergencies or campus safety concerns. Leaders need to be prepared to manage such situations effectively.

Fluckiger (2021) shares some of the conditions that higher education must meet in order to rise to the challenges ahead and meet the ones we are facing now. He highlights several themes, among them autonomy, connection, and innovation. These themes align with the major tenants of followership and Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007). Autonomy can mean more freedom but also more responsibility for universities. Fluckiger (2021) argues autonomy frees their energies, strengthens their reactivity, and gives them more legitimacy in the eyes of their partners: they can build an institutional project, make strategic choices, conduct a real recruitment policy, manage a global budget, ensure a new mission of professional integration of students. Connection becomes essential in a globalized world and Fluckiger states that institutions of higher education are not only globalized but possess globalizing abilities. Academic globalization is becoming more and more commonplace as universities are more open to exchanges. Exchanges in partnerships, students, research, and technology. Lastly, innovation is a requirement to meet the challenges ahead. Fluckiger states in a world of uncertainty is a must for institutions of higher education to think ahead. Not simply to follow the general trend or copy what is done elsewhere, but to invent, and reinvent. To not only train students to master current

knowledge and technologies, but to put them to work designing what will be or could be, what is yet to come, and what will be necessary to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

In following the frameworks of followership and Reversing the Lens unique opportunities arise for institutions of higher education to implement. Some of those opportunities include developing strategic partnerships, cultivating future leaders, embracing data-driven decision-making, advocacy, using crisis as a catalyst, and innovation. Collaborating with local industries, businesses, and other educational institutions can lead to innovative programs, research opportunities, and enhanced resources. Nurturing leadership skills among faculty, staff, and students can create a pool of future leaders who can drive the institution's growth and success. Leaders can use data analytics to inform strategic decisions, improve student outcomes, and enhance operational efficiency. Leaders have the opportunity to advocate for the value of education in society, engaging policymakers and the public to support the institution's mission. Effective leadership during crises can lead to institutional learning and growth, as well as the implementation of improvements for the future. Finally, just as innovation can be a challenge it can also be an opportunity. Innovation encourages diversity of thought and practice to explore alternatives to leading and moving organizations forward. Navigating these challenges and capitalizing on these opportunities requires adaptability, innovation, and commitment (Fluckiger, 2021). In this dynamic educational environment, leadership that is visionary, adaptable, innovative, and collaborative is essential.

#### *Summary of Themes/Findings about The Millennial Generation*

##### *Theme/Finding: Challenges and Opportunities in a Multi-Generational Workplace*

There is a growing interest in understanding generational differences in diverse settings, particularly in the workplace (Murphy, 2011). As of 2019, 56 million workers in the United

States were millennials making them the largest generational workforce (Fry, 2018). Millennials accounted for 3 million more workers than those from Generation X. Although the concept of millennials in the workplace is becoming more popular there is a lack of empirical evidence related to millennials and the characteristics they bring to their work (Galdames & Guihen, 2022). For instance, millennials in the workforce are often described using a series of negative adjectives. They are characterized as needy and high-maintenance (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010), and fragile and intolerant (Bodenhausen & Curtis, 2016). Furthermore, millennials are often described as job-hoppers who exhibit low organizational commitment (Edge et al., 2011). This has contributed to the idea that working with and leading this generation is a difficult chore.

Stereotypes among the generations can contribute to many of the challenges experienced in a multigenerational workplace, but stereotypes can be born out of misunderstanding and an unwillingness to learn about others' differences. Many of the challenges in a multigenerational workplace stem from generational differences which include differing communication styles, differing work ethics, technological adoption, leadership approaches, and the level of resistance to change. Different generations often have distinct communication preferences, which can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations further complicated by the addition of technology. Generational differences in work attitudes and ethics can cause conflicts, particularly if one generation perceives another as lacking dedication or being overly rigid. Varying levels of comfort with technology can create a digital divide and hinder collaboration, especially when younger employees are more tech-savvy. Generations may have differing expectations of leadership styles, causing friction between those who prefer traditional hierarchical leadership and those who value a more inclusive approach (Galdames & Guihen, 2022). Finally, older

generations might resist new processes or technologies, while younger generations might be perceived as pushing for change too quickly.

Challenges that exist between generations are mainly due to their differences and misunderstandings about generational attributes which prompt some to ask if typing generations is even beneficial. Some social scientists have been arguing that generational labels are harmful and unscientific (Shoichet, 2023). This argument has caught the attention of the Pew Research Center which is now changing its approach to generational analysis and reporting. Going forward, Pew announced it would only analyze generational data comparing generations at similar life stages to ensure they are highlighting generational change rather than differences in an effort to avoid perpetuating stereotypes (Shoichet, 2023). While the efforts of the Pew Research Center are admirable typing generations can be beneficial. Culture, society, and technology are drivers for generational change and can be responsible for generational differences. These drivers lead to defining characteristics in each generation that can help leaders understand their followers better, lead more effectively, and cultivate better relationships, all of which can contribute to better organizational operations and outcomes (Sobrino-De Toro et al., 2019). No generation is a monolith, but identifying differences and defining characteristics can be beneficial.

Just as challenges exist there are a myriad of opportunities that can come from a multigenerational workplace, some include diverse perspectives, knowledge sharing, skill diversification, increased adaptability, mentorship opportunities, learned flexibility, innovation, and succession planning. Multigenerational teams bring a range of perspectives and ideas, enriching problem-solving and innovation (Bialik & Fry, 2019). Different age groups can share knowledge and experience, enhancing learning and creating a culture of continuous

improvement. Each generation brings unique skills. Collaboration can result in a well-rounded skill set within the organization. A mix of age groups can make the organization more adaptable to change, drawing from both experience and fresh thinking (Sobrino-De Toro et al., 2019). Younger employees can benefit from the wisdom of older colleagues, while seasoned employees can learn new technologies and approaches from their younger counterparts (Kanaskie, 2006). Multigenerational teams can accommodate various work styles, enhancing flexibility and work-life balance (Pasko et al., 2020). The fusion of different ideas can lead to innovative solutions that cater to a wide range of stakeholders. Lastly, by nurturing talent across generations, organizations can ensure a smooth transition in leadership roles as older employees retire (Golden, 2014).

Effectively managing a multigenerational workplace involves recognizing and leveraging these challenges and opportunities, fostering collaboration, and creating an inclusive environment where all generations can thrive (Sobrino-De Toro et al., 2019). The multigenerational workplace brings about both challenges and opportunities. Ultimately, the multigenerational workplace presents a dynamic experience, where skillful leadership can take differences and transform them into a driving force for growth and progress.

*Theme/Finding: Effect on Leadership Practices and Development*

With millennials being the largest generation represented in the workforce today, companies must adapt quickly and apply appropriate leadership style techniques to achieve optimal company performance (Wolor et al., 2021). Theories developed for previous generations are not automatically applicable to millennials and require critical examination and adaptation if they are to offer an understanding of means for motivating and influencing millennials toward more broadly defined goals and aspirations in multigenerational workplaces (Balda & Mora,

2012). Millennials have had a significant impact on leadership practices and development in the workplace, driving changes in how leadership is approached and executed. Some key effects include incorporating the collaborative leadership style, emphasizing purpose, a renewed focus on work-life balance, technology integration, creation of feedback culture, emphasizing inclusive leadership, and recognizing the importance of authenticity.

Millennials tend to prefer a more collaborative and inclusive leadership style (Balda & Mora, 2012). This has influenced leaders to become more open to input from their team members and to foster a culture of shared decision-making (Wolor et al., 2021). Millennials value meaningful work and are more likely to engage when they see a clear purpose in what they do (Wesner & Miller, 2008). This has led to leaders emphasizing the importance of purpose-driven leadership, aligning their team's work with broader organizational goals (Farrell & Hurt, 2014). Millennials have highlighted the significance of work-life balance. As leaders, they have been instrumental in advocating for flexible work arrangements and policies that support employees' well-being (Wolor et al., 2021). Being a tech-savvy generation, millennials have pushed for the integration of technology in leadership practices. This includes using digital tools for communication, project management, and remote collaboration (Skiba & Barton, 2006). Millennials appreciate regular feedback and are more open to constructive criticism (Wesner & Miller, 2008). As leaders, they have promoted a feedback-rich culture, encouraged regular performance discussions and created opportunities for improvement. Millennials value diversity and inclusion (Kleinhans et al., 2014). This has prompted leaders to focus on building diverse teams, fostering an inclusive work environment, and addressing unconscious biases. Millennials appreciate authenticity in leadership (Wolor et al., 2021). This has led to leaders being more transparent, genuine, and approachable in their interactions with their teams. Millennials have

reshaped leadership practices by emphasizing collaboration, purpose, work-life balance, technology integration, continuous learning, feedback, inclusivity, and more. Their values and preferences have contributed to a shift towards more agile, inclusive, and people-centered leadership approaches.

### *Forecast Chapter Three*

In Chapter 3 of this dissertation, the methodology will be outlined, presenting a comprehensive blueprint for conducting a thorough investigation into followership within the context of the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach. This chapter will serve as a guide to navigate the study's methodology, research process, delineating the research design, data collection methods, participants, and data analysis techniques that will be employed. The primary research method for this study will be qualitative in nature, employing semi-structured interviews to capture the nuanced perspectives and experiences of millennial employees working in university settings. This approach will facilitate an in-depth exploration of how Shamir's (2007) Reversing the Lens approach influences their perceptions of followership and its impact on their career advancement strategies.

To ensure the study's rigor and validity, a purposive sampling strategy will be adopted, targeting millennial employees from diverse roles within universities. This approach will offer a well-rounded representation of followers' experiences and perspectives. Data collected from the questionnaires and interviews will undergo rigorous thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and trends while also quantifying the prevalence of certain viewpoints. The ethical considerations of informed consent, confidentiality, and data protection will be meticulously adhered to throughout the research process. The study's limitations and potential biases will be transparently discussed, ensuring the research's credibility, and allowing for a balanced



interpretation of the findings. This chapter lays the foundation for robust data collection, analysis, and the eventual synthesis of findings that will contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the research question at hand.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Introduction*

The methodology chapter serves as the compass guiding the research journey, delineating the strategies and approaches employed to uncover the intricate interplay between followership and Shamir's (2007) Reversing the Lens approach for millennials within the context of university settings. This pivotal chapter outlines the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques that converge to address the research question comprehensively. The qualitative nature of this research offers an avenue to explore the lived experiences, perspectives, and nuanced narratives of millennial employees as they navigate the landscape of followership within university environments.

This chapter also expounds upon the development of the research instruments. The semi-structured interview protocol was carefully constructed to foster rich discussions about participants' encounters with the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach and its implications for their understanding of followership and career advancement strategies. Simultaneously, the pre-interview questionnaire encompassed tailored items designed to measure key variables, facilitating the exploration of correlations and patterns. Central to the methodology chapter is the explanation of the data analysis process. The qualitative data collected from interviews underwent thematic analysis, unraveling emergent themes, patterns, and nuances within participants' narratives.

Furthermore, this chapter elaborates on strategies to ensure research rigor and validity. Methods such as member checking, triangulation, and bracketing were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings. As the backbone of the research, the methodology

chapter navigates the course toward comprehensive findings that inform the intricate relationships between followership and Shamir's (2007) Reversing the Lens approach. This chapter underscores the systematic and holistic nature of the study, cementing its contribution to the growing body of knowledge in the field.

### *Research Purpose*

The purpose of this study was to understand how millennials perceive and experience followership within the university context, how this approach influences their career decision-making processes, and how it shapes their strategies for professional growth and advancement.

The related research questions were:

1. How do millennials perceive and interpret the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach in relation to their career aspirations and growth development within university environments?
2. What are the current avenues for career advancement in universities and do these pathways resonate with millennials?
3. What challenges do millennials encounter when implementing the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach in their career development efforts at universities?

### *Research Design*

The research design employed to resolve the questions addressed by the study was that of a phenomenological qualitative study based on a social constructivist perspective utilizing questionnaires and interviews.

### *Nature of the Methodology*

#### *Epistemology*

A constructivist philosophy is a broad framework that underpins various approaches in education, psychology, and philosophy, among other fields. It posits that individuals actively construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through their experiences, interactions, and mental processes. In a constructivist view, reality is not something fixed and objective but is shaped by the unique perspectives, interpretations, and mental structures of each individual (Carsten et al., 2010). The constructivist perspective is a valuable framework for studying followership, as it allows for a nuanced exploration of how individuals construct their understanding and experiences of followership within social and organizational contexts. This can be done in the following ways:

1. **Active Construction of Followership Roles:** From a constructivist viewpoint, followership is not a passive role but an actively constructed one. This idea follows fittingly with the foundation of Shamir's (2007) Reversing the Lens approach. Individuals draw upon their beliefs, values, experiences, and interactions to define their roles as followers.

2. **Multiple Perspectives on Followership:** Constructivism recognizes that there can be multiple interpretations and perspectives on a given phenomenon. In the context of followership, this means acknowledging that different individuals may construct their understanding of followership differently (Carsten et al., 2010). This allows exploration of these diverse viewpoints and allows for an examination of how they influence followers' behaviors, attitudes, and interactions with leaders.

3. **Social Interaction and Followership:** Constructivism highlights the importance of social interaction in knowledge construction. This involves investigating how followers engage in dialogues and interactions with leaders, peers, and subordinates to co-construct their roles and

responsibilities as followers (Carsten et al., 2010). This perspective is especially relevant in understanding the social dynamics of followership within teams and organizations.

4. **Contextual Influences:** Constructivism emphasizes the role of context in shaping individuals' understanding and experiences (Louis, 1980). I explored how contextual factors, such as organizational culture, leadership styles, and situational demands, influence followers' construction of their roles. This included examining how followers adapt their behaviors and strategies in response to different organizational contexts.

5. **Development of Followership Skills:** Within a constructivist framework, followership skills and competencies are seen as something that individuals actively develop over time (Bresnen, 1995). This allows investigation of how individuals acquire and refine followership skills through learning, reflection, and experience, and how these skills impact their effectiveness as followers.

6. **Individualized Followership Experiences:** Constructivism recognizes that followers may have unique experiences and interpretations of their roles (Carsten et al., 2010). The exploratory nature of this study allowed me to examine the individualized nature of followership experiences, considering factors such as personality, values, personal goals, and generational factors that shape how individuals approach their follower roles.

Incorporating a constructivist perspective into this study allows for a deeper understanding of how followers actively engage with and contribute to their roles within the organizational context. It encourages researchers to consider the dynamic and context-dependent nature of followership and the various ways in which individuals construct their roles as followers. This perspective may lead to insights that enhance leadership practices and promote more effective follower-leader relationships.

### *Qualitative Methodology*

Phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology. It is a philosophical approach that has been adapted for use in social sciences and other fields as a research method (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Phenomenology seeks to understand and describe the essence of human experiences and the meanings people attribute to those experiences. In phenomenological research, researchers aim to explore the lived experiences of individuals by conducting in-depth interviews, analyzing texts, or using other qualitative data collection methods. The goal is to gain insight into how individuals perceive, interpret, and make sense of their experiences.

### *Appropriateness of the Methodology to the Research*

A constructivist perspective is highly appropriate for this study for the following reasons:

1. **Subjective Nature of Phenomenology:** Phenomenology aims to explore and understand the lived experiences and subjective realities of individuals. It is concerned with how individuals perceive and make sense of their world. A constructivist perspective aligns with this focus on subjectivity by emphasizing that individuals actively construct their understanding of the world, including their roles as followers.
2. **Active Role of Millennials:** Millennials are known for their engagement with technology, social media, and self-expression (Farrell & Hurt, 2014). They often play an active role in shaping their experiences and identities. A constructivist perspective acknowledges and values millennials' agency in constructing their roles as followers within the university context.
3. **Diversity of Perspectives:** Millennials come from diverse backgrounds, have varying career goals, and may hold different values and beliefs. A constructivist approach allows for the exploration of the diverse ways in which millennials construct their experiences of followership.

It recognizes that there may not be a single, uniform way of being a follower among this generation.

4. **Social Interaction and Dialogue:** Constructivism places a strong emphasis on social interaction and dialogue in knowledge construction (Creswell, 2009). Millennials are known for their collaboration and interconnectedness. In the university setting, they engage in dialogues with peers, supervisors, and students. A constructivist perspective can illuminate how these interactions contribute to the construction of their roles as followers.

5. **Contextual Influences:** Universities are complex environments with diverse departments, leadership styles, and organizational cultures. A constructivist perspective acknowledges that followership experiences are shaped by the context in which they occur. It allows for the examination of how contextual factors influence how millennials construct their roles as followers.

6. **Developmental Perspective:** Constructivism recognizes that individuals develop and evolve in their understanding and roles over time. For millennials, who are at various stages of their careers, this developmental aspect is crucial. A constructivist perspective can explore how their roles as followers evolve as they gain experience and expertise.

Phenomenology is an appropriate and valuable research methodology for this study for the following reasons:

1. **Exploring Lived Experiences:** Phenomenology is well-suited for exploring the lived experiences of individuals (Neubauer et al., 2019). In a followership study, this can involve gaining insights into how individuals perceive their roles as followers, the challenges they face, the meaning they attach to their follower experiences, and how these experiences influence their career advancement strategies.

2. **Subjective Nature of Followership:** Followership is inherently subjective, as it involves individuals' interpretations of their roles, relationships with leaders, and contributions to the organization (Uhl-Bein et al., 2014). Phenomenology allows researchers to delve into the subjective and personal dimensions of followership.
3. **Understanding Meaning-Making:** Phenomenology helps uncover the meanings that followers attribute to their experiences. This is crucial for understanding how followers make sense of their roles and how these meanings impact their behavior and decisions (Weick, 1995).
4. **Rich Qualitative Data:** Phenomenological research often relies on qualitative data collection methods such as in-depth interviews or diary studies. These methods can yield rich and detailed insights into followers' experiences and perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).
5. **Complexity of Followership:** Followership is a multifaceted phenomenon with various dimensions, including active vs. passive followership, role dynamics, and the impact of leadership styles (Uhl-Bein et al., 2014). Phenomenology's focus on depth and nuance is well-suited for exploring this complexity.
6. **Contextual Understanding:** Phenomenology allows researchers to situate followership within its broader contextual framework. It can uncover how organizational culture, leadership practices, and other contextual factors influence followers' experiences (Carsten et al., 2010).

The constructivist perspective and phenomenology align in many areas such as exploring subjectivity and lived experiences. They also recognize the active role that millennials play in constructing their understanding of followership and allow for an in-depth examination of the diverse and evolving ways in which they perceive and enact their roles as followers within the unique context of higher education. Combined this methodology offers the most robust approach to exploring followership perspectives and Shamir's (2007) Reversing the Lens approach as it



pertains to millennials in the higher education environment and their strategies for career advancement. This methodology allows for rich exploration where others may not capture the depth of insight. There is also an emphasis on constructed realities, flexibility, and adaptability. Constructivism aligns with the notion that individuals actively construct their realities. This is particularly relevant when studying millennials, a generation known for its agency and active engagement in shaping their experiences. Constructivist and phenomenological methods embrace the idea that followership is not a fixed, objective concept but is constructed by individuals within specific contexts. Both constructivist and phenomenological approaches offer flexibility, allowing researchers to adapt to the dynamic and evolving nature of millennials' experiences. Millennials may have unique perspectives and experiences that require a qualitative, open-ended approach to capture adequately. While constructivist and phenomenological approaches offer many advantages, it is important to acknowledge that no single methodology is universally superior. However, for a study focused on understanding the subjective experiences of millennials in university settings, defending the use of constructivist and phenomenological methodologies is well-supported by their compatibility with the research goals and the unique characteristics of the millennial generation.

### *Research Plan*

#### *Site, Population and Sample*

##### *Selection and Description of Site*

The selection and description of the interview site for this study are important to ensure transparency and provide context.

- Rationale for Site Selection: This is a study on followership among university millennials, therefore, a university campus was chosen as an interview site due to its direct

relevance. The setting was a small conference room, with a door to ensure privacy and confidentiality, and located in a building where none of the participants worked. Two interviews were conducted online via the Zoom platform due to scheduling and location logistics.

- **Accessibility and Convenience:** The in-person site and Zoom platform were both chosen for proximity to the participants, ease of scheduling, and contextual relevance to the study.
- **Privacy and Confidentiality:** The site, location, and online platform were chosen to ensure privacy and confidentiality. Since the nature of the study includes participants answering and describing experiences and situations that may include their current employer and leaders the site location was chosen to ensure the participants would feel comfortable sharing sensitive information without their co-workers and supervisors being nearby.
- **Alternative Options Considered:** Other locations were considered for the interviews (e.g., a local coffee shop, outside workspace, and local library), but they were deemed unsuitable due to scheduling, ease for participants, and relevance.
- **Ethical Considerations:** It was extremely important to pick a neutral, non-coercive, and low-pressure location to perform the in-person interviews to ensure participant comfort. The main objective was that the participants felt as comfortable as possible so they would feel free to provide open and honest answers to the questions in order to obtain rich descriptions in the findings.

Overall, the site selection was important to ensure many of the above aspects but also to ensure alignment with the research goals of this study. The professional and academic context of the research was considered in the site selection to reinforce the connection between the research context and the study's objectives. Participants may feel that their responses are situated within the appropriate academic context, facilitating a deeper exploration of their experiences as

followers in this specific environment. Selecting a controlled environment was essential to help standardize the interview conditions for all participants, ensuring consistency in the research process. It aligns with the research goal of collecting reliable and comparable data. Ensuring privacy and confidentiality aligns with the research goal of creating a safe and secure environment in which participants can freely express their thoughts and experiences related to followership. In a private setting, participants may feel more comfortable sharing sensitive information. Lastly, comfort and familiarity were considered to contribute to participant comfort and ease during the interview process. When participants feel at ease in the environment, they are more likely to provide candid and detailed responses, which aligns with the research goal of gaining rich insights into their followership experiences.

#### *Communication with Site*

The conference room was booked through an online scheduler with the university and a confirmation email was received once the room was approved for the dates and times selected by the participants.

#### *Selection and Description of Population*

The study focused on millennials employed in universities as the target population. The study centered on the millennial generation, also known as Generation Y, which is characterized by specific cultural, technological, and social experiences that distinguish it from other generations. For the purpose of this study, millennials were defined as being born between 1980 and 1995. The population included individuals who were currently employed or engaged in work-related activities within university settings. These settings encompassed various roles and positions within universities, such as administrative staff, support staff, researchers, and graduate assistants. Although the term university is used throughout this dissertation, this study focused on

individuals working in a variety of educational institutions, including universities, colleges, community colleges, and other tertiary education organizations. These institutions include both public and private and offer undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs. These institutions are located across Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. The population encompassed a diverse range of roles and responsibilities within university settings, including recruitment, research, administration, and student support services. It aimed to capture a holistic view of millennials' experiences across different functions within universities. The study considered millennials at various career stages within university settings, from entry-level positions to mid-career professionals. This allowed for a nuanced exploration of career advancement strategies. The population recognized the diversity among millennials, including factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, and cultural background. Lastly, exclusion criteria were set to exclude individuals who did not meet the qualifications or criteria deemed necessary for the study.

#### *Selection and Description of Sample*

For the study, non-probability sampling methods were used to select the research population, and sampling was performed in a layered fashion due to the specific population requirements of the study. First, a purposive sample was used since individuals were being chosen for a specific quality relevant to the study, i.e., millennials and working at a university. Next, convenience sampling was used because this particular population was easily accessible to the researcher. Lastly, the sample was also voluntary. Anyone who met the criteria of the study could voluntarily take part in the study. Interview participants were chosen randomly by the researcher from a group that fit the demographic and professional parameters of the research study. The group was numbered, and the lottery method was employed to choose randomly.

### *Communication with Sample*

#### Initial Contact and Recruitment:

- Initial communication for recruitment of potential participants was in the form of an email that clearly explained the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the time commitment, and the contact information for the researcher.

#### Informed Consent:

- Before participants agreed to take part in the study, they must have provided informed consent. The informed consent form was provided via email and outlined the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and the rights of participants.
- Participants were encouraged to ask questions and seek clarification about any aspect of the study before they gave their consent. Participants retained a copy of the consent form.

#### Scheduling Interviews:

- If participants expressed interest in participating, a calendar link was provided via email so the participants could select the date and time most appropriate for them.
- Clear instructions were provided regarding the interview format (in-person, phone, video call), any technical requirements, and location.

#### Reminder Notices:

- Reminder emails were sent the day prior to the participant's scheduled interview. This was a reminder of the time and location as well as a reminder that the pre-interview requirements should have been completed (signed consent forms and pre-interview questionnaires).

#### Interview Administration:

- During the actual interview administration, I maintained open and respectful communication with participants and provided a welcoming and non-judgmental environment for sharing experiences and perspectives.

- Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions or seek clarification during the data collection process.

#### Follow-Up and Clarifications:

- After data collection, I followed up with participants to clarify responses and gather additional information, if it was needed.

- I was responsive to any participant concerns or questions that arose during and after the study.

#### Sharing Findings:

- Once the research was completed, I communicated with participants to share key findings, if participants expressed interest in receiving this information.

- Member checking for verification purposes occurred at this stage.

Throughout the communication process, I emphasized the importance of maintaining the participants' privacy and confidentiality and assured the participants that their responses were kept confidential, and that data was anonymized. Lastly, I expressed gratitude to the participants for their valuable contributions to the study through a thank you email. Effective and respectful communication is crucial at every stage of the research process to foster trust, ensure ethical conduct, and maximize participant engagement. It also contributes to the quality and reliability of the data collected.

#### *Response Rate*

The response rate was 100%. Twelve participants were selected, and all twelve participants responded with intentions to participate.

### *Data Collection*

Within the research methodology of phenomenology, this study employed the techniques of a pre-interview questionnaire and interviews to generate data relevant to the research questions.

### *Nature of Pre-interview Questionnaire*

The pre-interview questionnaire was developed as a tool to gather initial information from participants before conducting in-depth interviews. It serves as a preparatory step to understand participants' general attitudes, preferences, and experiences related to followership. The development of the pre-interview questionnaire was informed by Robert Kelley's (1992) followership framework, which identifies specific dimensions of followership behavior. Kelley's model guided the selection of items and themes for inclusion in the questionnaire. The pre-interview questionnaire was designed to align with the research objectives of the study, which include exploring how millennials perceive their roles as followers and their preferences for leadership styles. The development of the questionnaire was grounded in a review of relevant literature on followership, specifically focusing on Robert Kelley's work. The review informed the selection of items and dimensions to be included in the questionnaire.

A questionnaire format was chosen for the pre-interview instrument because it allows for the efficient collection of data on followership dimensions and standardization before delving into qualitative interviews. This method was appropriate for capturing participants' initial perceptions. The initial design involved selecting items from Robert Kelley's followership questionnaire that were most relevant to the study's research objectives. These items were

adapted to fit the higher education context and the millennial population. Revisions were made, which included modifying item wording, clarifying instructions, and ensuring that the questionnaire was culturally sensitive and applicable to the millennial cohort in higher education. The questionnaire items were reviewed to ensure content validity by aligning them with Kelley's followership dimensions. Reliability considerations were addressed by maintaining consistency in item wording and response scale across all questionnaires. Finally, ethical considerations were taken into account by obtaining informed consent from participants before administering the questionnaire. Measures were also in place to protect participants' anonymity.

*Appropriateness of the technique.*

This technique was appropriate for data collection efficiency, triangulation with interview results, standardization, participant engagement, and privacy and anonymity. The pre-interview questionnaire was suitable for studies aiming to gather responses from a diverse group of millennials working in university settings. This provided a broader perspective on the research topic. Triangulating the questionnaire results with the interview findings enhanced the validity and reliability of the study. This allowed me to compare findings from both methods to identify convergent or divergent patterns, strengthening the overall conclusions. Triangulation helped with richer data presentation, theory development and refinement, and researcher perspective. Questionnaires allow for standardized data collection, ensuring that all participants receive the same set of questions and response options. This consistency enhanced the reliability and comparability of the responses. The questionnaire helped with participant engagement improving response rates. Lastly, participants may have felt more comfortable providing candid responses to sensitive questions in a self-administered questionnaire, as they can maintain a level of anonymity.



### *Development of Reliable/Valid/Trustworthy Materials/Instrument(s).*

The pre-interview questionnaire was adapted from Robert Kelley's Followership Questionnaire from his book *The Power of Followership* (1992). The questionnaire consists of eight questions asking participants to use a scale of 1 to 5 (1 meaning rarely and 5 meaning always) to indicate the extent to which each statement describes them and their behavior in that situation. Then there were five questions asking participants to use a scale of 1 to 5 (1 meaning not important and 5 meaning extremely important) to indicate the extent to which each statement describes their feelings. The scoring guide was also adapted from *The Power of Followership* (Kelley, 1992). The questionnaire produced an independent thinking score, an engagement score, and a millennial score. The independent thinking and engagement score indicates where the participant falls on Kelley's (1992) follower typology and the millennial score provides a moderating variable with which to gage the interview findings.

### *Procedure*

The pre-interview questionnaires along with the directions were distributed to the participants via email. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaire before their interviews in order for the questionnaires to be scored and the results were discussed during the interviews. Some questionnaires were completed manually, and some were completed electronically and returned either in person or via email. Once received the questionnaires were scored and translated to a qualitative attribute. The qualitative attributes were an independent thinking score, an engagement score, and a millennial score. These scores showed the participant's follower type, and the millennial score was a variable with which to compare to the interview themes. Participants were reminded to contact me at any time if they had questions or needed clarification.

### *Nature of Interviews*

The interview protocol was developed to serve as a critical tool for collecting in-depth qualitative data on the followership experiences of millennials employed at universities. It aimed to uncover their perceptions, challenges, and strategies in their follower roles within the higher education context. The interview protocol was informed by social constructivism, as it aligns with the study's focus on how millennials actively construct their roles as followers within a university setting. The theory suggests that individuals actively shape their understanding of the world, including their follower roles. The interview protocol was designed to address specific research objectives, including understanding millennials' motivations for working in higher education, their perceptions of effective leadership, and the impact of the reversing the lens approach to followership on their career advancement strategies.

The development of the interview questions was grounded in an extensive literature review on followership, leadership in higher education, and millennials in the workforce. The review provided insights into relevant theories, models, and existing research on the topic. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the data collection method because they allow for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions. The flexibility of this method was particularly suited to capturing the complexity of millennials' follower roles. The initial design of the interview protocol involved drafting a set of open-ended questions that covered key themes, including motivations for choosing a career in higher education, experiences as followers, leadership styles they respond to, and the role of the reversing the lens approach. Revisions and refinements of the interview questions were made. Ambiguous or overlapping questions were clarified, and prompts were added to encourage participants to provide detailed responses.

The final interview protocol consists of ten open-ended questions, organized into sections based on thematic areas. These questions encourage participants to reflect on their experiences, motivations, challenges, and perceptions related to followership and leadership in higher education. The interview questions were reviewed to ensure content validity, and efforts were made to establish construct validity by aligning questions with relevant theoretical constructs and the guiding research questions. While traditional measures of reliability are less applicable to qualitative data, steps were taken to enhance the dependability of the data collection process, such as maintaining consistency in interview procedures. Finally, ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring their anonymity, and following ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects.

*Appropriateness of the Technique.*

This technique was appropriate for in-depth exploration, context, flexibility, follow-up, and probing, studying complex phenomena, identifying emergent themes, rich data, validation, and ethical considerations. Interviews allow for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and attitudes. Given the complexity of the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach and career advancement strategies, the interviews provided a platform for participants to elaborate on their thoughts and experiences. University settings can be diverse and nuanced, and interviews enabled me to understand the unique context, culture, and dynamics of each university, which was crucial for comprehending how the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach was applied and its impact on career advancement. Interviews are flexible and adaptable. This enabled me to tailor questions to each participant's role, experiences, and context within the university, ensuring that the interview captured relevant and meaningful information. The interviews allowed for follow-up questions and probing. Allowing me to delve deeper into

specific aspects, seek clarification, or explore unexpected responses, leading to a richer dataset. When studying complex phenomena like leadership approaches and career advancement strategies, interviews can reveal the intricate interplay of factors, relationships, and decision-making processes. Qualitative interviews are well-suited for discovering emergent themes and unexpected insights. This can open up new ideas and perspectives that may not have been captured in a structured questionnaire. The interviews generated rich, detailed data that could be used to construct a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach's impact on career advancement strategies. The interviews were used to validate and triangulate findings from other data sources, such as the questionnaires. The convergence of findings from different methods strengthens the credibility of the study. Lastly, the interviews provided opportunities to address ethical considerations directly. I was able to ensure informed consent, protect participant confidentiality, and address any participant concerns during the interview process.

*Development of Reliable/Valid/Trustworthy Materials/Instrument(s).*

The decision to develop the interviews as semi-structured was to allow for as much flexibility as possible since this study is a phenomenological study focusing on the lived experiences of the participants and trying to understand their sensemaking. The semi-structured questions provided a flexible framework for conducting qualitative interviews, allowing me to cover specific topics while also encouraging participants to elaborate on their responses. Semi-structured interviews are common in qualitative research because they strike a balance between structure and flexibility, enabling the researcher to explore complex subjects while ensuring that key topics are addressed. Some key characteristics that were considered during the development of the interview questions were:

- **Open-Ended Start:** Semi-structured questions often begin with an open-ended, exploratory question that invites participants to share their thoughts and experiences freely. This initial question typically sets the tone for the interview and allows participants to provide narrative responses.

- **Focused Topics:** While semi-structured interviews encourage open discussion, they also include a predefined set of focused topics or areas of interest that the interviewer aims to cover. Here these topics were leadership, followership, Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007), career development, and advancement.

- **Probe and Follow-Up:** In the semi-structured interviews, I was able to use probing and follow-up questions to delve deeper into participants' responses. Probes seek clarification, examples, or additional details, while follow-up questions explore related aspects or invite further reflection.

- **Flexibility:** I had the flexibility to adapt the sequence and wording of questions based on the flow of the conversation and the participants' responses. This adaptability allowed for natural and unscripted interactions.

- **Standardization:** While semi-structured interviews offer flexibility, they also maintain some degree of standardization by ensuring that specific topics are consistently addressed across interviews. This helped in comparing and analyzing the data systematically.

- **Balanced Mix:** The semi-structured interviews enabled me to incorporate a mix of question types, including introductory questions, core questions related to the research objectives, and concluding questions that invite participants to provide overall reflections.

- **Rich Data Collection:** Semi-structured questions aim to collect rich, contextually embedded data by encouraging participants to share their perspectives, stories, and interpretations.

Semi-structured questions offer the advantage of combining structure and flexibility, allowing researchers to explore complex topics while ensuring that research objectives are met. They are particularly well-suited for qualitative research where in-depth exploration and participant perspectives are central.

### *Procedure*

#### 1. Pre-Interview Preparation:

- Scheduled interview appointments with participants and have communicated the date, time, and location.

- Prepared all necessary interview materials, including the interview protocol, consent forms (copies), and recording equipment.

#### 2. Setting up the Interview Space:

- Arrived at the interview location well in advance to set up the interview space. Ensure that it is comfortable, well-lit, and free from distractions.

- Arranged seating to create a relaxed and open environment. Ensured that the seating arrangement promotes a conversational and non-threatening atmosphere.

#### 3. Greeting and Introduction:

- Welcomed the participants warmly as they arrived for the interview.
- Started with a brief introduction of myself, the purpose of the study, and a reminder of the confidentiality and voluntary nature of their participation.

- Reiterated the informed consent process and answered any questions or concerns they may have. Provided the participant with a copy of the informed consent form.

#### 4. Commencing the Interview:

- Began by explaining the interview process, its approximate duration, and the types of questions I would be asking.

- Encouraged the participants to speak freely and assured them that there were no right or wrong answers. I emphasized that their honesty and openness are highly valued.

#### 5. Follow the Interview Protocol:

- Followed the interview protocol and started with introductory/demographic questions and gradually delved into the more specific topics.

- Used active listening skills to engage with the participant and asked follow-up questions to explore their responses in greater depth.

- Encouraged participants to reflect on their experiences and provide detailed narratives.

Used probing questions to elicit rich and meaningful responses.

- Ensured that the interview remained participant-centered, allowing them to guide the conversation within the boundaries of the research objectives.

#### 6. Recording

- Monitored the recording equipment to ensure it was functioning properly throughout the interview.

#### 7. Closing the Interview:

- Summarized key points discussed during the interview.

- Invited the participant to share any additional thoughts or experiences they feel are relevant.

- Thanked the participants for their time and contributions to the study.

#### 8. Post-Interview Debrief:

- Offered a debriefing session to allow participants to share their thoughts and feelings about the interview experience.

- Provided my contact information for any follow-up questions or concerns they may have.

#### 9. Follow-Up:

- Sent a thank-you email or letter to participants after the interview to express my gratitude for their participation and to reiterate the importance of their contribution to my research.

#### 10. Data Management:

- Safeguarded all collected data, including audio recordings, consent forms, and any handwritten notes. Ensured that the data was stored securely.

### *Data Analysis*

Data generated by techniques previously described were subsequently interpreted through the analysis techniques/procedures of the pre-interview scoring guide and thematic analysis.

#### *Nature of Pre-interview Questionnaire scoring guide*

The pre-interview scoring guide was adapted from Kelley's (1992) followership questionnaire scoring guide from his book *The Power of Followership*. The scoring guide takes the participant's numerical answers for questions 2, 4, 7, and 8 and totals them for the independent thinking score. The participant's numerical answers for questions 1, 3, 5, and 6 are totaled to produce the engagement score. The independent thinking score and the engagement score are the coordinates on the x-axis and y-axis of the follower-type grid. Both the x-axis and y-axis on the follower grid run from 0 to 20. Once the scores are plotted on the follower type grid



the follower type is revealed. The follower types are based on Kelley's (1992) follower typology of exemplary, pragmatist, conformist, alienated, and passive.

The millennial score shows the strength of millennial based on the six defining millennial characteristics by Farrell & Hurt (2014): (1) multi-taskers, (2) desire structure, (3) achievement-focused, (4) technologically savvy, (5) team-oriented, and (6) seek attention and feedback. The scale for millennial strength runs from 1 to 5. The millennial score is based on the numerical answers from the five millennial questions. The participant is scored on how many of each number they chose for each question (i.e., mostly 5s or mostly 3s).

#### *Application to the Data.*

The pre-interview scoring guide served several important applications in the context of the research data including:

1. **Qualitative Transformation:** The pre-interview scoring guide allowed me to take the numeric values from the questionnaire and assign qualitative attributes. This process aims to extract rich, descriptive, and contextually meaningful information from numerical data points.
2. **Pattern Recognition:** Once the qualitative attributes were assigned, I was able to identify patterns, recurring themes, and commonalities in the data. This was helpful in triangulating this data with the interview data.
3. **Initial Theme Analysis:** The scoring guide helped me recognize some initial themes that may have been important to look for and explore more in the interview data.
4. **Interview Question Formation:** The pre-interview scoring guide helped identify early themes which provided guidance on ways to revisit and revise some of the interview questions before conducting the interviews.

5. Understanding the Interplay of the Generational Aspect of the Research: The pre-interview scoring guide produced the millennial score to show how strongly some of the participants identified with the common characteristics of the millennial generation. This allowed for a deeper exploration of the nuances and intricacies of the millennial generation and how generational characteristics impact their ideas about followership and career development. *Validity/Trustworthiness/Triangulation.*

To demonstrate the validity and trustworthiness of the pre-interview scoring guide I used participant validation to receive feedback and confirm accuracy. The pre-interview results and scoring guide were reviewed with the participants to ensure quality of interpretation and provided a chance for participants to confirm that the findings accurately represented their experiences, provide additional insights, challenge interpretations, or offer corrections where they believed the data had been misunderstood or misinterpreted. The participants' feedback was integrated into the research findings, and any necessary revisions or adjustments were made to ensure that the final results were an accurate reflection of the participants' perspectives. This is significant to enhance credibility, help reduce researcher bias, and improve validity and trustworthiness.

The questionnaire data was triangulated with the interview data to highlight overlaps and outliers in the themes in order to enhance the findings. Method triangulation was important here since data was being collected from both the pre-interview questionnaire and interviews. This allows for cross-verification, confirmation, and possible complements to the findings. Further, triangulation can reveal contradictions or discrepancies that may require further exploration. Triangulation contributes to robust findings, reduced bias, increased validity, and improved generalizability.

### *Nature of Thematic Analysis*

Thematic analysis is used in qualitative research for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns and themes within a dataset. It is a systematic approach that helps researchers make sense of qualitative data, such as interview transcripts, focus group discussions, or open-ended survey responses. Thematic analysis involves several key steps (Braun & Clarke, 2020):

1. **Data Familiarization:** I read and re-read the texts to become familiar with the content. This step helped me gain an overall understanding of the material and any initial impressions.
2. **Data Coding:** In this step, I started by coding the data. Coding involves systematically labeling and categorizing segments of text that represent meaningful ideas, concepts, or patterns. These codes are typically short phrases or keywords. Coding can be done manually with pen and paper or digitally using specialized software. For this study, it was done manually. As the coding progressed, I identified more specific codes and grouped related codes into categories. This process helped in organizing the data and identifying patterns and themes.
3. **Theme Development:** After coding and categorization, I began to develop the themes. Themes are overarching concepts or patterns that emerge from the data. A theme captures a central idea or meaning present in the dataset. It is important to ensure that themes are grounded in the data and supported by evidence.
4. **Review and Refinement:** I continuously reviewed and refined the themes. This process involved revisiting the data and themes to ensure they accurately represented the content. Here themes may merge, split, or be renamed as needed.
5. **Defining and Naming Themes:** Each theme was defined and given a clear, concise description. I also provided quotations from the data to demonstrate how the theme manifested in the dataset.

6. Mapping and Interpretation: I examined how the themes related to one another and explored the broader implications of these findings. This step involved interpreting what the themes revealed about the research questions and topic.

7. Writing the Report: The final step was to write a report or for this study the findings chapter. The findings chapter includes a description of the research context, data collection methods, the thematic analysis process, and the identified themes. I provided evidence from the data to support each theme and discussed their implications.

#### *Application to the Data.*

Thematic analysis served several important applications in the context of the research data including:

1. Pattern Recognition: Thematic analysis helped identify patterns, recurring themes, and commonalities in the qualitative data obtained from interviews. It allowed me to recognize themes that emerged across different participant responses.

2. Organization and Structure: Thematic analysis provided a structured approach to organizing the qualitative data. It helped me systematically categorize and group segments of data that pertained to specific themes or topics.

3. Data Reduction: Thematic analysis condensed a large amount of interview data into a more manageable and interpretable form. It allowed me to distill the essence of participants' experiences and perspectives, making the data more accessible for analysis and interpretation.

4. Exploration of Research Questions: Thematic analysis helped me explore the research questions and objectives of the study in depth. By identifying themes related to followership, leadership, and career advancement strategies, I could answer research questions and gain insights into the study's focus areas.

5. Understanding Complex Phenomena: The study involves exploring complex phenomena, such as the impact of Shamir's (2007) Reversing the Lens approach on career advancement strategies. Thematic analysis provided a means to systematically examine and understand the complexities through the view of participants' narratives.

6. Contextual Interpretation: Thematic analysis allowed me to interpret qualitative data within the context in which it was collected. It helped me understand how participants' experiences are influenced by the unique dynamics of higher education institutions.

7. Integration with Questionnaire Data: Thematic analysis complemented the questionnaire data by providing qualitative depth and context to those findings, enriching the overall understanding of followership among millennials.

#### *Validity/Trustworthiness/Triangulation.*

To demonstrate the validity and trustworthiness of the interviews I used participant validation to receive feedback and confirm accuracy. The interview data was triangulated with the pre-interview questionnaire to highlight overlaps and outliers in the themes in order to enhance the findings. This study aimed to have quality and quantity as an approach to data saturation which was recognized when the ability to obtain new information was no longer feasible. The process, context, participants, and methods were meticulously detailed and documented to provide a quality audit trail as well as quality descriptions in order to ground the findings and reduce bias. Thematic analysis enhanced the validity and trustworthiness of the study by providing a systematic and transparent approach to data analysis. It also allowed for the rigorous examination of data, ensuring that the findings were grounded in the data itself.

#### *Role of the Researcher*

##### *Qualifications*

I possess a strong educational background, significant professional experience in higher education, and a unique generational perspective that contributes to the depth and relevance of the research. My qualifications as the researcher in this study are as follows:

- **Educational Background:** I hold a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree, which provides a solid foundation in business and management principles, research methodologies, and critical thinking skills. The MBA qualification is particularly relevant to this research as it equips me with a strong analytical and strategic mindset. This skillset is advantageous for analyzing leadership and followership dynamics within university settings.
- **Professional Experience:** I have accumulated over eight years of diverse and progressively responsible experience within the higher education sector. This extensive tenure has exposed me to various facets of university operations and leadership. Working within a university environment for an extended period has afforded me insider knowledge of the intricacies of higher education institutions. This familiarity is advantageous for conducting research within this specific context.
- **Roles in Higher Education:** Throughout my career in higher education, I have held multiple roles across different departments and areas of university administration. These roles include but are not limited to admissions, student affairs, academic advising, and institutional research.
- **Millennial Perspective:** As a member of the millennial generation, I bring a firsthand understanding of the unique challenges, expectations, and values that characterize this generational cohort. This perspective is invaluable for exploring the experiences of millennials in higher education.

- **Commitment to Ethical Research and Dedication to Rigor:** I am committed to conducting this study with the highest ethical standards and have obtained all necessary institutional approvals and have implemented ethical safeguards to protect the rights and confidentiality of study participants. I am also dedicated to maintaining rigor in all research phases, from study design to data analysis.

These qualifications collectively position me to conduct a well-informed, insightful, and comprehensive study on followership among millennials in university settings. The combination of academic acumen, professional experience, generational perspective, and ethical commitment ensures the research's credibility and potential to contribute meaningfully to the field of higher education leadership.

### *Biases*

It is important to acknowledge any potential biases I may have as a researcher, as these biases can influence the research process, data collection, and interpretation of findings. As the primary researcher for this study, I recognize the importance of addressing potential biases that may arise due to my identity as a millennial working within a university environment.

Reflexivity, self-awareness, and a commitment to transparency are central to ensuring the credibility and integrity of this research. Some potential biases to recognize include:

#### 1. Generational Bias:

- **Recognition:** Being a millennial myself, I acknowledge the potential for generational bias. My own experiences, values, and perspectives may align closely with those of the participants. This alignment could influence my interpretation of data and the framing of research questions.

- Mitigation: To mitigate generational bias, I have sought guidance and feedback from mentors and colleagues of different generational backgrounds. Additionally, I maintained a reflexive approach by continuously questioning my assumptions and biases throughout the research process.

## 2. Institutional Bias:

- Recognition: Working within a university environment, I may have a deep understanding of the institutional dynamics, challenges, and cultures specific to this context. This knowledge could inadvertently shape my interpretations of participants' experiences.

- Mitigation: To address institutional bias, I maintained a critical perspective and actively sought input from colleagues who were not part of the university setting. Their perspectives helped to ensure a more well-rounded analysis that considered both the strengths and limitations of the university context.

## 3. Progressive Values Bias:

- Recognition: As a millennial, I may have values and viewpoints that align with progressive ideals, such as inclusivity and social justice. This alignment might inadvertently influence my interpretation of data related to values and beliefs.

- Mitigation: To address potential progressive values bias, I approached the data analysis with an open mind and a commitment to representing diverse perspectives. I also used a rigorous analytical approach to avoid imposing my own values on the data.

By openly acknowledging these potential biases and implementing mitigation strategies, I aimed to conduct this research with the highest level of objectivity and rigor. This reflexivity ensures that the findings represent the diverse experiences and perspectives of participants while maintaining transparency and ethical research practices. Including a section on researcher bias



demonstrates my commitment to conducting an impartial and credible study. It also serves as a basis for addressing potential bias during data analysis and interpretation.

### *Responsibilities*

As the researcher in this study, I had several important responsibilities to ensure the quality, ethical conduct, and validity of this research. Those responsibilities included:

#### 1. Research Design and Planning:

- Developed a clear and well-defined research plan, including research questions, objectives, and methodology.
- Conducted a thorough review of existing literature to inform the study design.
- Selected appropriate research methods and tools, such as interviews and questionnaires, and justified their use.

#### 2. Ethical Considerations:

- Obtained informed consent from all participants, ensuring they understood the purpose, risks, and benefits of participation.
- Maintained strict confidentiality and privacy protections for participants.
- Complied with ethical guidelines and institutional review board (IRB) requirements.

#### 3. Data Collection:

- Recruited participants using transparent and unbiased methods.
- Conducted interviews and administered questionnaires according to the approved research protocol.
- Maintained clear and transparent documentation of all research activities.
- Ensured data accuracy, completeness, and security.

#### 4. Data Analysis:

- Analyzed qualitative data (e.g., interview transcripts) using appropriate methods such as thematic analysis.

- Maintained rigor and transparency in the analysis process.

#### 5. Interpretation of Findings:

- Interpreted the research findings objectively.
- Avoided making unsupported or biased conclusions.
- Discussed the implications of the findings in relation to the research questions.
- Provided detailed descriptions of your research methods in the research report.

#### 6. Data Management:

- Safeguarded all research data to ensure data integrity.
- Stored data securely and in compliance with data protection regulations.

### *Timeline*

See Figure 3.1 page 196.

### *Time Span*

The data collection time span was seven weeks. Email invitations to participants went out a week before the six weeks dedicated to the interviews. This was an effort to give participants enough time to review the pre-interview materials and the calendar of interview dates and times. Also, to honor the time commitment of the participants I wanted to be able to offer a time span that could accommodate each person's schedule requirements and constraints. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes up to 1 hour. Once the interviews were concluded the participants no longer had a time commitment to the study unless follow-up was required. The data analysis time span was four weeks from the date of the last interview, in order to ensure enough time to review the data, code, assign themes, and implement respondent validation. Two weeks were allotted to

begin writing chapter four the findings chapter, and another two weeks after that to begin writing chapter five the implications and conclusions chapter. The overall time span for data collection, data analysis, and reporting was 15 weeks.

### *Chronology of Events and Procedures*

#### Pre-Research Phase:

1. Research Conceptualization and Proposal (Months 1-3):
  - Define the research topic and objectives.
  - Develop a research proposal, including research questions, objectives, and a review of relevant literature.
2. Literature Review (Months 4-5):
  - Conduct an extensive review of existing literature to inform the research.
  - Identify gaps, theories, and concepts relevant to the study.

#### Research Planning and Preparation:

1. Methodology Design (Months 6-10):
  - Define the research methodology (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods).
  - Decide on data collection methods (e.g., surveys, interviews, observations).
  - Develop data collection instruments (questionnaires, interview guides).
2. Participant Recruitment (Months 11-12):
  - Recruit and select participants according to the research criteria.
  - Obtain informed consent from participants.

#### Data Collection Phase:

1. Data Collection (Months 13-17):

- Implement data collection procedures (e.g., conduct interviews, administer surveys, collect observations).
- Maintain data records and ensure data integrity.

#### Data Analysis Phase:

1. Data Analysis (Months 18-20):
  - Analyze data using appropriate techniques (e.g., statistical analysis, thematic analysis, content analysis).
  - Interpret the results in the context of the research questions.

#### Research Reporting and Conclusion:

1. Report Writing (Months 21-22):
  - Draft the research dissertation.
  - Organize findings, methodology, literature review, and conclusions.
2. Peer Review and Feedback (Month 22):
  - Seek feedback from participants.
  - Revise the research dissertation based on feedback.
3. Finalization and Submission (Month 23):
  - Prepare the final version of the research dissertation.
  - Submit the research dissertation.

#### Post-Research Phase:

1. Presentation and Dissemination (Month 24):
  - Present and defend research findings.
  - Publish research in peer-reviewed journals or academic publications.
2. Reflection and Future Directions (Ongoing):

- Reflect on the research process and its outcomes.
- Consider potential follow-up studies or areas for further investigation.

### *Summary/Coherency of Design*

#### *Validity/Trustworthiness*

Validating the trustworthiness of a qualitative research study is crucial to ensure that the findings accurately reflect the participants' experiences and that the study's methods are robust. In qualitative research, trustworthiness is often assessed using criteria such as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

##### 1. Credibility:

- Participant validation: After conducting the interviews, the findings were shared with participants for feedback. This member-checking process allowed the participants to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations and the themes.
- Triangulation: Multiple data sources were used to corroborate the findings. When different data sources converge on similar themes, it enhances the credibility of the study.

##### 2. Dependability:

- Audit trail: A detailed record of the research process, including data collection, coding, and analysis was maintained. This audit trail allowed for transparency and ensured that the research could be replicated.
- Peer debriefing: Engaging in discussions with colleagues or peers who are knowledgeable about qualitative research helped ensure that the interpretations were consistent and dependable.

##### 3. Confirmability:

- Reflexivity: I reflected on my biases and preconceptions throughout the research process.

I documented how my own perspectives might have influenced data collection and analysis, and described how these biases were mitigated.

- Data saturation: Strive to reach data saturation, where new data no longer provide additional insights or themes. This demonstrated that the findings were grounded in the data rather than influenced by researcher bias.

#### 4. Transferability:

- Thick description: Provided detailed and context-rich descriptions of the research context, participants, and methods. This enabled readers to assess the transferability of the findings to similar contexts.

- Negative cases: Present not only typical cases but also any outliers or negative cases in the findings. This provided a more complete picture of the phenomenon under study.

### *Verification*

Verification is the process of checking, confirming, and being confident. In qualitative research, verification refers to the mechanisms used during the process of research to incrementally contribute to ensuring reliability and validity and, thus, the rigor of a study (Morse et al., 2002). One verification technique this research implemented was member checks or respondent validation. This is where data or results are returned to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Birt et al., 2016). This accomplished two things: first, it helped to reduce researcher bias by actively involving the participant in checking and confirming the research results, and second, it helped verify and assess the trustworthiness of the research results. Other verification methods that were used include audit trail, bracketing, and consistency checks.

Maintaining a detailed audit trail is crucial for transparency and verification. All stages of the research process, including data collection, coding, analysis, and decision-making were thoroughly documented. This documentation allows others to trace the researcher's steps and assess the validity of the interpretations. In phenomenological research, bracketing involves acknowledging and setting aside preconceived notions, biases, or assumptions that the researcher may hold about the phenomenon being studied (Chan et al., 2013). This helped to ensure that the data and interpretations were not unduly influenced by my prior beliefs. Consistency checks, also known as data consistency checks or coder consistency checks, are a quality control measure used in qualitative research. The primary purpose of consistency checks is to ensure that the coding process remains consistent and reliable throughout the research study (Leung, 2015). This included coding consistency checks and reporting. Since the interviews were conducted over a period of time it is important that the coding is consistent from early interviews through to later interviews. The results of the coding consistency checks were documented to show any discrepancies and how the discrepancies were resolved. This transparency allows readers to assess the reliability of the coding process. Consistency checks are not a one-time activity but an ongoing process throughout the data analysis phase.

### *Triangulation*

Triangulation in qualitative research involves using multiple sources of data, methods, or settings to investigate a research question from different angles, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings (Carter et al., 2014). Both data source triangulation and time triangulation were employed for this study. For data source triangulation, interviews were conducted with participants in different settings or contexts. In this study, some participants had a face-to-face interview with the researcher in a conference room setting while others had their

interviews online through the Zoom platform either from their offices or homes. The benefits of triangulating interviews in different settings include:

- **Enhanced Validity:** Triangulation helps ensure that findings are robust and not limited to a specific context or group.
- **Increased Reliability:** Multiple sources of data reduce the risk of errors or biases associated with a single method or setting.
- **Comprehensive Understanding:** Triangulation allows researchers to explore the complexity of the research topic from various angles, leading to a more complete picture.
- **Confirmation of Findings:** Consistent findings across different settings provide stronger evidence to support research conclusions.

Time triangulation involves conducting interviews at different time points or over an extended period. This can help capture changes or developments in participants' experiences and perspectives. Each participant chose a date and time that worked best for them for their interviews and the interviews occurred over a six-week time period. This approach revealed different layers of meaning and provided a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

### *Limitations*

The limitations of this study included time constraints of the participants and societal trends. Time constraints could have affected the quality of responses for the in-person interviews, for example, if there was a time crunch or the participant was juggling multiple projects. Finally, current societal trends could have skewed the responses to the interview questions. With the current climate elevating ideas about employee wellness, burnout, and employer responsibility to work-life balance in light of an increase in remote work options, the pandemic, and the impacts



of the Great Resignation, participants' responses could have been influenced in ways they would not have been just two years earlier.

Data saturation could have been a limitation of this design in that there is no one-size-fits-all method to reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Therefore, the approach to this design and sampling for this research was thought of through data richness and thickness (Dibley, 2011). This study aimed to have quality (richness) and quantity (thickness) as an approach to data saturation. Data saturation is reached when there is enough data to replicate the study (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012) when the ability to obtain new information is reached, and when further coding is no longer feasible (Guest et al., 2006). Overall, the research design and methodology contributed to being able to construct, complete, and interpret the data in a timely manner that honored the time and commitment of the participants and the researcher while maintaining the integrity and trustworthiness of the study.

Lastly, recall bias could have been a limitation in that participants may have had difficulty accurately recalling past experiences or events, which could have affected the reliability of their responses. In order to mitigate this, I used prompts, timelines, and participant diaries to improve the accuracy of recall. By recognizing and addressing these potential limitations, I was able to conduct a more robust and credible study ultimately contributing valuable insights to the field.

#### *Forecast Chapter Four*

In chapter four, the findings that emerged from the in-depth exploration of the impact of the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach to followership on millennials' career advancement strategies within the unique context of university settings will be presented. This chapter unveils the voices, experiences, and perspectives of the participants, offering a

comprehensive view of how this approach shapes their career trajectories. Through a thematic framework, we will narrate the stories, perspectives, and experiences of the millennial participants in their roles within university settings.

Chapter four is the culmination of the rigorous research process, offering a comprehensive account of the major themes and key insights that emerged from the data analysis. It is here that we can connect the dots between the research objectives, methodology, and the rich data collected from the participants. As we venture into the findings presented in chapter four, please keep in mind the collaborative effort between myself and the participants, as their voices and experiences take center stage in our exploration of followership among millennials in the dynamic landscape of higher education.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### *Introduction*

In the preceding chapters, we explored the influence of the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach to followership on the career advancement strategies of millennials employed within the dynamic and ever-evolving environment of higher education. I have laid the foundation, defined the research question, clarified the methodology, and discussed the theoretical and interpretive frameworks that have guided this process. Now, as we step into Chapter 4, the Findings chapter, we begin to examine and explore the outcomes of the data collection – the discoveries, the stories, and the unique perspectives that emerged through this qualitative phenomenological study.

This chapter showcases the exploration of the experiences of the millennials who generously shared their experiences, aspirations, and challenges. The narratives presented here reflect not just data, but the essence of individuals navigating the academic ecosystem as followers and as millennials. The qualitative approach allowed for a deep dive into the rich tapestry of personal experiences. Through in-person interviews and a pre-interview questionnaire, I sought to uncover the nuanced, often unspoken aspects of followership in university settings. These voices, these stories, are not only a testament to the resilience of millennials in academia but a mirror reflecting the multifaceted nature of followership itself.

Beginning this chapter, we will answer the main research question as well as each guiding question, and you will find four distinct themes, each unfolding its own narrative within the overarching story. Each theme reflects the influence of the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach on the career advancement strategies of millennials in universities. The analysis

will unveil the common threads that connect these narratives, revealing shared challenges, motivations, and strategies.

These findings are not only the result of the methodological choices but also the product of the collaborative effort between the researcher and the participants. In the spirit of phenomenology, this chapter honors the lived experiences of the participants, as their voices guide us in our quest to understand the complex interplay between followership and career advancement.

The purpose of this study was to understand how millennials perceive and experience followership within the university context, how this approach influences their career decision-making processes, and how it shapes their strategies for professional growth and advancement.

The research question was:

What is the influence of the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach to followership on the career advancement strategies of millennials employed at universities?

Guiding questions:

1. How do millennials perceive and interpret the Reversing the Lens approach in relation to their career aspirations and growth development within university environments?
2. What are the current avenues for career advancement in universities and do these pathways resonate with millennials?
3. What challenges do millennials encounter when implementing the Reversing the Lens approach in their career development efforts at universities?

The design of the study was a qualitative phenomenological study employing the data collection methods of in-person interviews and a pre-interview questionnaire. The study also conducted a literature review of related research and theory in the areas of followership theory,

Shamir's (2007) Reversing the Lens approach, career advancement strategies, culture and identity of institutions of higher education, and the millennial generation.

### *Presentation and Summary of Data*

#### Descriptive data about site

This was a study on followership among university millennials, therefore, a university campus was chosen as an interview site due to its direct relevance. The setting was a small conference room, with a door to ensure privacy and confidentiality, and located in a building where none of the participants worked. Two interviews were conducted online via the Zoom platform due to scheduling and location logistics. The site, location, and online platform were chosen to ensure privacy and confidentiality. It was extremely important to pick a neutral, non-coercive, and low-pressure location to perform the in-person interviews to ensure participant comfort. The main objective was that the participants felt as comfortable as possible so they would feel free to provide open and honest answers to the questions in order to obtain rich descriptions in the findings. The professional and academic context of the research was considered in the site selection to reinforce the connection between the research context and the study's objectives. Participants may feel that their responses are situated within the appropriate academic context, facilitating a deeper exploration of their experiences as followers in this specific environment.

#### Descriptive data about sample

- **Sample Size:** The study comprised of thirteen participants. Originally twelve participants were contacted for participation and all twelve responded affirmatively. During the data collection process, one participant needed to drop out and was replaced by an alternate.

Before the conclusion of the interviews the participant who dropped out was available again to participate, which increased the original sample size from twelve to thirteen participants.

- Response Rate: 100%
- Participant Selection Criteria: Participants were selected based on their current employment in a college or university, their status as a staff member, and lastly, they were selected based on their classification as a millennial. Millennials for this study were born between 1980 and 1995. It was important to have a diverse range of experience in this study, therefore, particular interest was paid to including newer professionals as well as more seasoned employees.
  - Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria: Participants were limited to staff currently working in a college or university setting and they were required to have a birth year between 1980 and 1995. Faculty were not included in this study.
  - Geographic location: The participants were all located in the Southeast part of the United States. Specifically, the participants were from colleges and universities located in North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia.
  - Anonymity and Confidentiality: Participants were not required to list their names, employers, or any other personally identifiable information on research materials other than signing the consent form. Consent forms were kept secure at all times. Participant interviews were conducted off-site and away from the participant's normal working area or office. Participation in this study was not discussed outside of the participant-researcher relationship.
  - Unique Characteristics: Participants must have been currently working in a college or university setting and fall into the 1980-1995 range to be classified as a millennial to take part in this study.

Table 4.1

Participant Demographics

Demographic	Number of Participants
Millennial Age Range	42-29
Year Born	1981, 1982, 1985, 1986, 1988, 1990-1994
Gender	38% Male 62% Female
Educational Background/Level	15% High School Diploma 31% Bachelor's Degree 54% Advanced Degree (Master's or higher)
Race	8% Mixed Race 38% Black 54% White
Job Title	31% Support Staff 23% Assistant/Associate Director 8% Director 23% Assistant/Associate Dean 15% Dean
Marital Status	46% Single 54% Married
Years of Experience in Higher Ed (Range)	19 years–2 years

*Findings: 1. How do millennials perceive and interpret the Reversing the Lens approach in relation to their career aspirations and growth development within university environments?*

When exploring millennials' experiences with the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach within the university setting, I started by trying to understand what follower means to millennials in this context and what their perceptions were of the leader/follower dynamic based on their experiences. Remembering that Reversing the Lens addresses three things (1) the impact of follower characteristics on follower behavior, (2) the impact of follower behavior on leader perception and behavior and vice versa, and (3) the impact of both followers and leaders on

followership outcomes (Northouse, 2021). When participants were asked about what follower means to them the most common response was that the word follower has a negative connotation, and it does not make someone want to identify as a follower. The characteristics that were shared about followers included being supportive, compliant, accepting influence, team player, asking questions, and following directions. Based on this feedback participants felt that these qualities were qualities they took on when acting as a follower in their organizations in relation to their leaders. However, it was widely agreed upon that there is no leadership without followers, and follower influence in the leadership process is significant.

When asked about their perceptions of the leader/follower dynamic within the university setting the participants were split between traditional perceptions and more progressive perceptions. Half the participants shared a more traditional view including leaders giving directions and followers carrying them out, the leader is the planner, and the follower is the doer, and the leader influences and the follower accepts the influence. One follower noted, “Me as a follower, I’m a doer and I expect my leader to be a planner.” Another participant said, “I see my role as supportive, supporting the goals, supporting the mission. Whereas my leader should set the tone, be inspirational, and encourage followers to support the leader’s vision.” The other half of the participants shared more progressive perceptions including leaders asking questions and followers providing feedback and input, leaders bringing ideas and plans and followers providing suggestions and solutions. The progressive perceptions revolved around leaders and followers co-creating or co-constructing the leadership and decision-making process rather than leaders making proclamations and followers blindly carrying out directives. One participant said, “The leadership process is symbiotic where one influences the other and each strengthens the other.” Even though the responses for perceptions on the leader/follower dynamic within the university



setting were split between traditional and progressive views, responses to how one's leader makes space for one to contribute to the leadership process all included elements of collaboration and inclusivity. Participants praised their leaders for being open and trusting in asking them for feedback, suggestions, and input and also advocating for them in places and spaces where they were not present.

Here we can see social construction present in how participants think about the role of follower, how that affects the way they enact the role of follower in their duties and in relation to their leaders, and the influence of their environment on their perceptions. Social construction theory suggests that followership roles and expectations are socially constructed and influenced by cultural norms, organizational dynamics, and leadership practices (Carsten et al., 2010). How followers are expected to behave, interact with leaders, and contribute to the organization is shaped by social expectations and historical patterns. Participants acknowledged that the university setting influences their ideas of the roles followers are expected to perform, and social norms drive the relationship between leaders and followers. One participant said, "Especially at my organization if you don't have a close relationship [with your leader] and the right type of close relationship you are not going to be promoted or have influence and you are probably not going to stay in this environment."

Hierarchical structures are highly prevalent in university organizational designs and participants acknowledged that the hierarchical structure within universities had a significant influence on not only their perceptions of the leader/follower dynamic but on the relationships they form with their leaders. One participant noted, "Hierarchical structures can be valuable in that there is a delineation in roles and responsibilities. There can be an iterative relationship where the follower is providing perspective to guide the leader's decision-making in ways that

move the organization and the function of that relationship or area forward.” Participants recognized the differences in relationship formation and expectations between their direct supervisors and their division vice presidents. Direct supervisors are more likely to ask for input and suggestions during plan formation, whereas vice presidents expect for the plan to be carried out as it was presented. Participants also acknowledged more acceptance of assuming the traditional follower role for vice presidents than for their direct supervisors. This leads to perceptions of power, authority, and influence on follower role perception and formation.

Followership is closely tied to power and authority dynamics within social structures (Courpasson & Dany, 2003). Social construction theory recognizes that the perception of leaders' power and authority, as well as followers' responses to this power, are socially constructed and influenced by the context in which they operate. For example, one participant mentioned their leader does not ask for suggestions or create an environment that is conducive to alternative solutions to work plans, therefore, they carry out the directives from their leader and they do not deviate from the plan. They make sure to follow instructions to the letter, they are compliant and submissive. When asked why they do not challenge authority they responded, “Rocking the boat is just not a good idea, and unsolicited feedback is not tolerated; my leader is a perfectionist, and it is just best to follow what they have laid out.” In this environment, it is expected that the leader knows best which is why they are in a leadership position and followers are expected to trust their leader’s direction and carry out their duties with no questions. When this participant was asked if they had leadership that was more open to suggestions and input if that would affect the way they approached their job they responded yes. They would be more comfortable offering feedback without fear of being shut down or ignored. This demonstrates how both formation of identity and negotiation of roles are influenced by social construction.

Social construction theory emphasizes how followers' identities are formed through their interactions with leaders. Followers' self-concepts, roles, and sense of belonging within the organization are shaped by social interactions and the meanings attributed to their positions (Bresnen, 1995). Lastly, social construction theory highlights how followers may negotiate their roles and contributions based on situational demands, personal values, and the expectations of their leaders and peers (Uhl-Bein & Pillai, 2007). Followership roles are not fixed but are subject to negotiation and reinterpretation within specific contexts. If the context were different this participant would enact a different follower role. Furthermore, one participant noted that “Institutional context has an effect on how I show up as a follower. I have to ask how do I take advantage of opportunities in a space that wasn’t created for me. It’s a navigation and a negotiation so I can show up and share in different places and spaces.”

Overall, millennials understand the necessity of the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach as it relates to the changing environmental landscape and the strategies they have for their careers, but they also acknowledge that this approach is not being fully realized within the university setting due to a myriad of reasons. Old ideas of traditional top-down leadership are still very strong in the university context and show up in many ways including the organizational design of divisions, departments, and universities as a whole. Millennials are responding to this in one of two ways. They are either “playing the game” as one participant phrased it, or they are planning to leave the higher education industry altogether.

*Findings: 2. What are the current avenues for career advancement in universities and do they resonate with millennials?*

In exploring the current avenues for advancement in universities and whether or not they resonate with millennials, I first sought to understand how millennials make career decisions and

if there were any job-related factors that specifically influenced their decision-making. When examining how millennials make decisions about their careers, participants consistently referenced four considerations: their families, location, benefits, and salary. Over half of the participants identified as married with children with the remaining participants identifying as single or not married. Regardless of marital status, all participants referenced family whether children, parents, or siblings as a major consideration in their career decisions. The participants with children referenced schooling logistics for their children as challenges and those without children referenced not wanting to be far from parents and immediate family. Location as a consideration was mentioned in tandem with distance from parents and immediate family and adjustment issues whether environmentally or educationally for those with children. One participant said, "If I didn't need to be here geographically then my job search and expectations would be wildly different." Benefits that were referenced as major factors included paid time off, retirement plans, insurance plans, and salary.

Salary was a single benefit that was delineated by each participant that was important relative to their current salary. Of the participants, an overwhelming majority mentioned that financial considerations were more important in their career decisions than they would like them to be, but the current environment dictates that salary is something they cannot ignore. One participant responded "I would love to make career decisions purely off my passions and what each job is going to afford me in that vein, but this economy won't allow me to do that. Salary considerations take up a big chunk of my decision-making, unfortunately." Cost of living considerations drive this choice. Each participant considers increased salary as a deciding factor in the career-building process. Each participant felt these factors were foundational to the decision-making process when it came to career development, whereas environmental factors

were more considered when differentiating between career development factors and job-related factors.

Job-related factors that the participants consider included opportunities for growth and to be a change agent, challenging work, supportive leaders, autonomy, and organizational culture. All of the participants expressed their desire to work in positions that allowed them the opportunity to grow without having to change positions. This is significant in that it reminds us of one of the six defining characteristics of the millennial generation which is that they are achievement-focused. Lack of professional growth and development is one reason millennials can be accused of job-hopping. Millennials place a high value on continuous learning and professional development (Wesner & Miller, 2008). Millennials also desire to be change agents (Hershatler & Epstein, 2010). Another factor that participants cited as important when it comes to jobs is the opportunity to affect change or be change agents. Millennials behave as consumers of the workplace, weighing their options and continually looking for roles and organizations that enable their best performance (Gallup, 2018).

Organizational culture was a factor that was common among participants as it relates to alignment. Many participants referenced organizations' ability to learn from the environment and put forth an effort to adapt in the face of the changing work landscape. Millennials tend to seek work environments that align with their values and offer a sense of purpose and meaning in their roles (Wesner & Miller, 2008). Organizational rigidity was cited as a highly undesirable aspect for participants when evaluating a potential job. This was a common theme when participants offered ideals they looked for in a working environment which included flexibility, adaptability, inclusivity, supportiveness, and understanding. These findings are significant as they relate to

common characteristics of the millennial generation and significant still as they relate to leaders trying to attract and maintain this generation in the workforce.

After creating a foundation for how the participants make decisions about their careers, they were asked to explain how career advancement occurs in higher education based on their experiences. The top five responses that were given by nearly every one of the participants included networking, who you know/nepotism, hard work, advanced education, and years of experience. The sentiment most widely shared was that advancement happens differently in higher education than in other industries, when asked how so, participants responded that higher education seems to value a person's years of service to the organization much more than any other quality. Much to the chagrin of those who may be more qualified for a position, people with longevity more often than not end up with the promotion. Many participants felt that working hard and obtaining an advanced degree helped in advancement opportunities, but most often it seemed like networking and relying on personal connections weighed more heavily in their experiences of how advancement occurs in higher education.

When asked what strategies the participants employed pertaining to advancement and career development the top five responses were obtaining more education, professional development, networking, hard work, and self-advocacy. When asked if these strategies were in part due to their experiences with how advancement occurs in higher education all participants responded yes. Some participants recognized that horizontal or lateral movement was beneficial in their desires to build their careers as well. One participant noted that recently they were promoted, and they stated, "It's less about the fact that I wanted the title, but I understand how this Dean title affects how my next employer will view me." Although some have had experiences where no matter what one does to become a top candidate the promotion will go to

the person with the most years of experience regardless of qualifications, participants recognize once again that they need to “play the game” in order to continue working in higher education or leave the industry altogether. As one participant put it, “If you’re going to stay on this career path [higher education] that means saying yes more than saying no.”

Overall, the current avenues for advancement in higher education still lean very traditional and rely heavily on who you know versus qualifications. The participants believe hard work and education should take precedence over longevity, but in their experiences, longevity is often always rewarded. The current practices for promotion and advancement do not resonate with millennials, however, some millennials seem to be resigned to work within the system and hope it will eventually change with one participant noting, “I think it will happen slowly in pockets” while others are seeking opportunities outside of higher education.

*Findings: 3. What challenges do millennials encounter when implementing the Reversing the Lens approach in their career development efforts at universities?*

While old and more traditional practices for promotion and advancement have proven to be a hindrance in the career development process, other challenges the participants have encountered include organizational politics, silos, culture issues, hierarchies, stagnant leadership, and non-inclusive environments. While exploring these challenges the participants cited difficulties in their relationships with their leaders and characteristics of higher education as an industry as contributors to many of the challenges listed above. Participants recognize that a good working relationship with their leaders is essential to their work and how they show up at work. The majority of the participants stated they want to bring their whole selves to work, and they want their leaders to embrace that. They want their leaders to recognize that they are more than just an employee some are parents, caregivers, students, partners, etc. Participants cited

having a good relationship with their leader makes them want to work harder, but it is extremely difficult to work for someone who you cannot build a relationship with. One participant said, “I will work hard for a good leader, but bad leadership will only get the bare minimum, no above and beyond.” When millennials feel valued and appreciated, employers are typically rewarded with loyalty, passion, and enthusiastic work (Hershatler & Epstein, 2010). Here the participants responded that shared identities between themselves and their leaders made relationship-building much easier. One participant said, “To see in my organization a woman provost AND a woman president is significant because I don’t feel those same opportunities would have existed if there were not women in those roles already because the relationships look different when you’re a woman reporting to a man or any marginalized identity. Those relationships are not as easy not as organic. Shared identities make building and cultivating relationships less difficult.” They felt it was easier to connect and more comfortable to bring their whole selves to work when they had shared identities with their leaders. Many participants stated that some of their best working relationships have been with leaders with shared identities and over half of the participants shared that women leaders specifically black women leaders were the most caring, nurturing, and supportive leaders they have ever had. Many participants brought up generational challenges between them and their leaders. One participant responded, “Baby Boomers view working hard, longevity, and dedication to the organization as the only ways to advance whereas the younger generation don’t feel that same drive to stay at organizations where they can’t grow in a more timely manner.”

Participants were quick to respond that some of the characteristics of the higher education industry are hindrances to career building and need to change. Some of the challenges like hierarchies, silos, and stagnant leadership were attributed to old traditional values perpetuated in



higher education. The most common response here was leadership takes the “this is the way we’ve always done it” attitude and this causes conflicts with millennials. One participant noted, “In my experience, I’ve seen almost an immediate resistance where leaders are like nope, I said we’re doing it this way so make it happen.” When the participants were asked if they felt multigenerational workplaces were beneficial all responded yes. They acknowledge that institutional knowledge is important, and longevity has its place, but when these factors start to hinder progress or become instruments of non-inclusion, they become a problem. Almost half of the participants agreed that they have been excluded from the decision-making process in institutions where the leadership was made of up a majority of baby boomers.

Hierarchies and silos are prevalent in institutions of higher education and many participants point to organizational design as the main culprit. Hierarchies and silos create barriers to connection which leaves many millennials feeling isolated, ignored, and they make other areas and people seem inaccessible. This is a major conflict for millennials in that they value inclusion and collaboration, both of which are hindered in this situation. Participants mentioned being mission-driven, believing in the power of education, and being drawn to the higher education industry due to those factors. Participants cited a lack of connection to the institution and its leaders as the top two reasons they would consider leaving their organization. One participant stated, “Connection to the organization and the mission of the organization fuels my purpose and allows me to feel like I’m making a difference in my work.” Participants also acknowledge silos as a significant hindrance in networking, one of the top ways in which participants acknowledge advancement happens in their organizations.

In general, participants recognize that the source of the challenges they face revolve around industry and institutional rigidity and tradition, which is ultimately a pushback to

progressiveness. Participants try to leverage good working relationships with their leaders into professional development, networking opportunities, and in the long run advancement opportunities. Participants acknowledge that some progression is happening but agree that it is not happening fast enough to keep in line with the changing educational or working environments. Many are hanging on to the hope that significant change will come soon and are content to stay and continue to work within the system, however, some are planning to move out of higher education soon. Other industries that participants mentioned moving toward included healthcare, business, and government. One participant said, "I'm not one hundred percent bought into the fact that I will stay in higher education until I retire. It's too limiting, by the time I was 25 I was making more than my mom was at 50. As millennials we've seen what our parents have done, and we want better. Better might just be in another industry." Overall, each participant mentioned the desire to stay in higher education, but they understand that they may find fulfillment elsewhere and they are open to that.

*Findings: Pre-interview questionnaire results.*

The pre-interview questionnaire consisted of two sets of questions where participants were to use a Likert scale of 1 to 5 to rate each set of questions. The first set pertained to the participant's follower type and the second set measured the participant's millennial strength. The first set of questions produced an independent thinking score and an engagement score which were then plotted to indicate the participant's follower type based on Robert Kelley's follower typology (1992). Kelley's follower types include exemplary, pragmatist, conformist, alienated, and passive. The total scoring was from zero to twenty broken down into high, middle, and low. High scores were between 20 and 15, middle scores were between 14 and 8, and low scores were between 7 and 0. The millennial score was a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being very strong and 1 not

strong at all. The higher a participant's millennial score was the stronger a millennial they are based on the millennial characteristics from Farrell & Hurt (2014).

Of the thirteen participants over half scored high/high typing them as exemplary followers and the remaining participants scored middle/middle typing them as pragmatic followers. Of the exemplary followers all scored extremely high on both the independent thinking and engagement scores with the exception of one who was low exemplary borderline pragmatic. Of the pragmatic followers everyone scored firmly in the realm of the pragmatic type again with the exception of one who was low pragmatic borderline conformist. The average millennial score was 4, with a median score of 4.2, and a mode of 4.

#### *Summary of Results*

Based on the preceding presentation and summary of data generated by the study, a summary of themes is as follows:

1. Theme One: Followership, following, and being a follower is socially constructed but highly contextual.

As the participants answered the interview questions and meditated on the role of a follower, how they show up as a follower, and what followership looks like in their organizations, the clear theme was that followership, and its constructs are heavily influenced by social construction. From how we think of follower characteristics to the expectations institutions have of their followers, there are strong social construction roots. This can be seen through the influence of organizational culture on follower roles and activities, perceptions of power and authority between leaders and followers, follower identity formation, socialization and learning, and interpersonal and group dynamics. This can be confined to individual departments or offices and can be as widespread as the entire organization.

Further still we see that these constructs are highly contextual. Leader relationships, perceptions of power and authority, progressive versus traditional leadership styles, and organizational design all influence the concept and constructions of followership. One participant knew that if their context were different then their follower role and activities would be different as well. Context be it environmental, cultural, or positional was shown as a major contributor to the ways in which the participants characterized followers, contribute as followers, and encourage their followers for those that participate in positional leadership or possess a traditional leadership position.

2. Theme Two: Advancement in higher education is unlike other industries.

Advancement in higher education operates differently than in other industries. In this context, this is shown as a hindrance to mobility within the higher education space. Participants either have other industry experience or know those who do and have experienced the ways in which advancement in higher education is not only different but difficult. Advancement opportunities are not always awarded to the person who is best qualified, but to the person who has the best connections or the most organizational longevity. One participant referenced that longevity in his position at his alma mater felt like giving the organization the home team discount which spurred him to seek other opportunities for growth both professionally and financially. So even here we can see where longevity can only take one so far.

Participants recognized the benefits of longevity as it pertains to institutional knowledge and learning opportunities. However, hard work and proper qualifications are what participants believe should be rewarded, not years of service. Therefore, some participants have included an exit plan in their career strategies. With organizations becoming less fulfilling, leaner, and flatter with limited upward advancement opportunities individuals are becoming more transactional in

their actions with their employers, with fewer employees defining their identities through their organizations and growing more distant and less loyal (Laud & Johnson, 2012). Taking primary responsibility for personal needs and career advancement is becoming more paramount for those who have been disappointed by organizational practices.

3. Theme Three: Institutions and industry are responsible for the main challenges to inclusion in the leadership process as well as advancement opportunities.

Many of the challenges reported by the study participants had common roots in their institutions and in the higher education industry. Many of these challenges revolve around traditional viewpoints, culture, history, and legacy. The culture and identity of institutions of higher education are shaped by a complex interplay of influences. The combination of these influences forms the foundation upon which the institution's values, traditions, and identity are built. Each institution develops a unique culture that defines its character, distinguishes it from others, and influences the experiences of its members – students, faculty, staff, and alumni. However, this can be a hindrance to the health of the institution when adherence to tradition and culture comes at the expense of its members. When individuals within an institution become comfortable with the status quo, they may resist adopting new methodologies, technologies, or innovative practices. In a rapidly changing world, adherence to traditional methods without consideration for emerging trends can lead to an institution becoming less relevant. This can affect the institution's ability to meet the needs of its members. Colleges and universities struggled during the COVID-19 pandemic when a switch to online instruction was implemented, and they struggle further still with hybrid and work-from-home schedules for their staff. However, the innovation, adaptability, and flexibility that come in these situations are the exact qualities participants responded with when citing influential job factors and factors that may end

up pushing them out of the higher education space. Complacent attitudes may discourage experimentation and innovation. A mindset that says, "this is how we've always done things" can stifle creativity and limit the adoption of new and more effective approaches.

Leadership plays an important role in communicating the culture and identity of institutions. Participants acknowledge progression and change on the part of their direct supervisors but still see rigidity and refusal to change from higher leadership. Due to the hierarchical nature of institutions of higher education both in structure and design, refusal to innovate or deviate from the norm on the part of higher leadership can hinder progress for middle managers and lower-level supervisors. A complacent culture can make it challenging for colleges and universities to attract and retain top talent. Innovative and forward-thinking professionals may seek environments that encourage growth and adaptation. Clinging to traditional practices may result in inefficiencies. For example, using outdated administrative processes or educational methods can impede the institution's ability to operate optimally and meet the evolving needs of its members.

4. Theme Four: Core millennial characteristics of work-life balance, bringing the whole self to work, desire for meaningful and fulfilling work, and family runs throughout the career decision-making process.

Work-life balance, the whole self at work, meaningful and fulfilling work, and family were four themes that were constant throughout the interview process with the participants. These themes showed up as factors to consider when making career decisions, evaluating prospective job opportunities, forming relationships with leaders, seeking out advancement opportunities, and comparing other industries to higher education. These themes are significant in that they are in line with the research on millennial characteristics as well as millennial work

environment preferences. This helps to dispel many of the stereotypes about the millennial generation since stereotypes can be born out of misunderstanding and an unwillingness to learn about others' differences which can contribute to even more challenges in the workplace environment.

As with challenges come opportunities. Focusing on these characteristics from the interviews not only shows us alignment with current research but also sheds light on opportunities for current leadership. Participants shared that these characteristics are major factors in their decision-making processes, but also in how they show up at work, relate to their leaders and organizations, and how they determine their strategies for development. The opportunity or lack thereof for each of these characteristics in their environments informs how the participants view current opportunities as well as future ones. Leaders can become advocates for their followers and support employee well-being in a myriad of ways just by understanding these key characteristics. A shift towards more purpose-driven leadership may also help both leaders and followers get more of what they are seeking from their work environments. These characteristics were significant so much so that they wound through each topic in the interviews which is a signal of their importance as factors and drivers for the participants in many ways pertaining to their current careers, aspirations, and strategies.

#### *Forecast Chapter Five*

During this chapter, we were able to unveil the insights that emerged from the exploration into the influence of the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach to followership on the career advancement strategies of millennials within the academic sphere. In this chapter, the voices and narratives of the millennial participants were presented, highlighting the significant themes that emerged during the qualitative phenomenological analysis. A description

of the site and sample were reviewed to include the importance of the site for the in-person interviews and the specific demographics of the sample of participants. A review of the per-interview questionnaire was included to show the different follower types and millennial scores among the participants. Further insights will be presented in chapter 5, the conclusions chapter.

The research question and the guiding questions were examined through the analysis of the interview results which produced four significant themes. The themes included (1) followership, following, and being a follower are socially constructed but highly contextual, (2) advancement in higher education is unlike other industries, (3) institutions and industry are responsible for the main challenges to inclusion in the leadership process as well as advancement opportunities, and lastly (4) core millennial characteristics of work-life balance, bringing the whole self to work, desire for meaningful and fulfilling work, and family runs throughout the career decision-making process. Throughout this chapter, the findings and themes were presented in detail, supported by quotes and narratives from the millennial participants. Each finding and theme contributed to a deeper understanding of how the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach influences millennials' career advancement strategies in university settings.

In Chapter 5, the Conclusions chapter, the conclusions related to the research purpose, a comparison of the findings to the literature, interpretations, and conclusions derived from the research findings, implications, and suggestions for future research will all be presented. This chapter serves as the platform to not only summarize the findings, but also to synthesize the broader implications and contributions of the research to the fields of followership theory, leadership theory and practice, and higher education. It is here we will further connect the dots between the findings and the broader domains of followership theory, leadership development and practices, the millennial generation, and career advancement strategies. Chapter 5, the



Conclusions chapter represents not only the culmination of the research journey, but also the beginning of a new chapter in the ongoing quest to understand, empower, and elevate millennial followers within higher education.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### *Overview*

Chapter 5, the Conclusions Chapter serves as the culmination of an empirical examination of the influence of the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach on the career advancement strategies of millennials within the context of the university setting. Through a qualitative phenomenological lens, we have delved into the narratives and experiences of millennial participants, aiming to distill substantive insights that contribute to the understanding of leadership dynamics and advancement practices in higher education.

This chapter provides a summary of the study to include revisiting the contents of chapters one, two, and three. The aim is to succinctly revisit the methodology, objectives, and the progression of the study to orient the reader to the subsequent synthesis of findings. The core of this chapter lies in the synthesis of key findings derived from the thematic analysis of participant narratives. Therefore, a restatement of the major findings is necessary, followed by conclusions, and implications for practice, the literature, and future research. An exploration of the implications of the research for both institutional practices and policies within higher education aims to provide actionable insights that may guide decision-makers in fostering environments conducive to career development for millennials.

In the academic sphere, we delineate the contributions of this study to existing scholarship. This includes an examination of how the research extends or challenges current theoretical frameworks, enriches the discourse on followership and leadership and adds a nuanced layer to our understanding of the intricate interplay within the university context.

The purpose of this study was to understand how millennials perceive and experience followership within the university context, how this approach influences their career decision-making processes, and how it shapes their strategies for professional growth and advancement.

The research questions guiding the study were:

1. How do millennials perceive and interpret the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach in relation to their career aspirations and growth development within university environments?
2. What are the current avenues for career advancement in universities and do these pathways resonate with millennials?
3. What challenges do millennials encounter when implementing the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach in their career development efforts at universities?

This chapter presents a discussion of findings and conclusions related to this research purpose.

#### *Summary of the Study*

This study investigated millennials' experience or lack thereof with the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach to followership while working in academia and the influence those experiences have on their career planning and development.

Chapter One introduced the research through a description of the background, purpose, approach, significance, delimitations, limitations, and vocabulary of the study.

Chapter Two reviewed literature about theory and research related to the study in the areas of followership theory, Shamir's (2007) Reversing the Lens approach, the millennial generation, culture and identity of institutions of higher education, and career advancement strategies.

Chapter Three detailed the design of the study through a description of a phenomenological qualitative study based on a social constructivist perspective utilizing questionnaires and interviews.

Chapter Four presented and summarized data generated by the study design in alignment with the study research questions.

This final chapter will discuss a summary of the findings related to the research purpose and reviewed literature. The chapter content will also discuss the conclusions and implications of the study for practice, leadership for the advancement of learning and service, and research.

#### *Summary of Major Findings*

Overall, I found that the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach is being practiced at varying degrees within the context of the university, and millennial followers recognize and are receptive and welcoming of this approach. This approach incorporates many preferences and characteristics that appeal to millennials. Effecting change or being a change agent is important to millennials, it was a sentiment echoed by the study participants and is a central ideal of the Reversing the Lens approach to followership. The findings in this study are aligned with the current literature and research on the characteristics and preferences of the millennial generation and the multigenerational workplace. The leader/follower relationship in the university setting is significant to millennials as it pertains to the influence on their work and their career development. Leaders do have an impact on how millennials view their roles in their organizations and how they show up in those roles. Creating a positive and sustainable leader/follower relationship is important to millennials and influences the way they make plans and decisions about their careers. Lastly, millennials understand and are aware of the current practices for advancement in higher education and while these practices do not resonate with

millennials some are willing to work within the system to stay in the higher education industry, but many are not and are actively seeking opportunities in other industries.

### *Conclusions Related to Research Purpose*

Study findings related to: How millennials perceive and interpret the Reversing the Lens approach in relation to their career aspirations and growth development within university environments.

1. Participants understand the necessity of followership as it relates to Shamir's (2007) Reversing the Lens approach, but it is not being fully realized or implemented in the higher education environment.

2. Old ideas of traditional leadership are still very strong in the university setting.

Comparison of Findings: Participants understand the necessity of followership as it relates to Shamir's (2007) Reversing the Lens approach, but it is not being fully realized or implemented in the higher education environment to Literature.

The Reversing the Lens approach to followership, as proposed by Shamir in 2007, is a theoretical framework that challenges traditional notions of leadership and followership by shifting the focus from the leader to the followers. This approach suggests that effective leadership involves not only understanding the behaviors and traits of leaders but also comprehending the perspective, needs, and behaviors of followers. The emphasis under this approach is on followers as change agents. Shamir argues that followers should not be seen as passive recipients of leadership but as active participants who contribute to the leadership process. This approach encourages leaders to view followers as valuable assets with insights, creativity, and contributions that can significantly impact the success of leadership initiatives and organizational outcomes.

The Reversing the Lens approach emphasizes the importance of creating an inclusive and supportive environment where followers feel empowered to express their perspectives, voice concerns, and collaborate with leaders. The core premise of the Reversing the Lens approach is to reverse the traditional focus solely on leaders and redirect attention to the followers. This shift in perspective acknowledges that followers are not passive recipients but active contributors to the leadership process. Overall, the Reversing the Lens approach challenges the traditional top-down perspective of leadership and calls for a more holistic understanding of leadership dynamics by considering the viewpoints and contributions of followers. It highlights the mutual influence between leaders and followers, ultimately contributing to more collaborative and successful leadership practices. Carsten et al. (2010) expound on this approach by focusing on the factors that influence how followers construct their roles, the various follower roles and orientations that exist, and how leadership and organizational contexts impact these constructions.

When examining how Reversing the Lens is being practiced in the university context participants acknowledged that most of their immediate supervisors incorporate inclusivity and collaboration in their leadership practices by asking for feedback and insight and being open to discussion and dialogue on the decision-making process rather than handing down directives with the expectation that the directives will be carried out unquestioned. This aligns with the literature in one way in which the Reversing the Lens approach can be practiced. However, participants also acknowledge that this level of inclusion wanes the higher the level of leadership. One of the core tenets of the Reversing the Lens approach is challenging traditional top-down perspectives of leadership which is a challenge in and of itself in the university context. Participants recognize that this is an entrenched view in the higher education landscape

and a barrier to relationship building and career development. Participants also recognize that their leader's view of leadership and practice of leadership influence the way in which they construct and respond in their role as a follower. Uhl-Bein et al. (2014) include in their framework that in addition to understanding how followers construct their roles there are different ways in which these roles can be enacted, much of which is consistent with follower typologies. From the Reversing the Lens perspective these behaviors are a product of the follower interacting with their leaders and such behaviors can enhance or detract from the leadership process and in some cases overthrow it altogether.

Participants were asked some of the characteristics they valued in a leader which included inclusive, trusting, empowering, collaborative, and engaging. Here we can see a clear alignment with the values, focus, and intentions of the Reversing the Lens approach. Participants who grasped the importance of the Reversing the Lens approach perceived a value in fostering a culture where leadership is not solely top-down but involves a reciprocal understanding between leaders and followers. They recognized its potential to empower individuals and enhance overall engagement by acknowledging the value of diverse perspectives and they value contribution causing them to seek environments where their input is acknowledged, contributing to a sense of empowerment and fostering increased engagement. Many participants view leadership as a shared responsibility and happily contribute when given the opportunity, however, for some the opportunities are sparse.

Comparison of Findings: Old ideas of traditional leadership are still very strong in the university setting to Literature.

The culture and identity of institutions of higher education are shaped by a complex interplay of influences. The combination of these influences forms the foundation upon which

the institution's values, traditions, and identity are built. The leadership style and governance structure of the institution influence its culture (Fluckiger, 2021). Culture can be difficult to change because it is expressed through many facets of the organization and can be deeply entrenched in ways that are hard to identify contributing further to the difficulty that can be organizational change (Shugart, 2012). Many participants mentioned organizational culture as a factor that influences the decisions they make about their career, as a job-related factor that influences their decision to take a job, and as a reason for why career advancement can be difficult in higher education.

Applying the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach in universities involves reimagining the traditional dynamics between staff members and administrative leaders, which unfortunately according to the study responses is where the conflict lies. Millennials tend to prefer a more collaborative and inclusive leadership style (Balda & Mora, 2012). Millennials have highlighted the significance of work-life balance and have been instrumental in advocating for flexible work arrangements and policies that support employees' well-being (Wolor et al., 2021). Being a tech-savvy generation, millennials have also pushed for the integration of technology in leadership practices. This includes using digital tools for communication, project management, and remote collaboration (Skiba & Barton, 2006). While many of these concepts and ideas were present before the Covid-19 pandemic, many of them grew in intensity during and since the pandemic and it has been no secret that this is something that colleges and universities have struggled with.

Some studies suggest that traditional leadership styles prevalent in higher education institutions may not align with the preferences and expectations of millennials (Barnes & Gearin, 2022). Millennials tend to value participative and collaborative leadership styles that promote



inclusivity and opportunities for their involvement in decision-making processes (Gorman et al., 2004). Hence the need for a focus on followership within leadership practices. When these leadership styles are lacking, millennials may feel excluded and disengaged, leading to a higher likelihood of leaving their jobs.

Study findings related to: The current avenues for career advancement in universities and do they resonate with millennials.

1. The current avenues are old and traditional.
2. These avenues do not resonate with millennials.
3. Millennials are “playing the game.”

Comparison of Findings: The current avenues are old and traditional to Literature.

Colleges and universities have been slow to embrace corporate America’s approach to formal succession planning for their leadership (Witt/Kieffer, 2008). Succession planning and management have been used by industries to address employment gaps by developing internal talent to fill potential leadership and administrative openings. Higher education is not immune to this phenomenon. Compounding this loss of talent is the knowledge that the skill set required of an academic leader today is much different from the skill set required of academic leaders 40 years ago. However, according to the study responses, advancement practices have not changed in that timeframe either. Current avenues for advancement in higher education still rely heavily on employee longevity and nepotism compared to skillset and suitability.

Comparison of Findings: These avenues do not resonate with millennials to Literature.

Millennials, like any generation, have diverse needs and aspirations when it comes to their jobs (Rigoni & Adkins, 2016). However, certain values and preferences are often associated with millennials in the workforce. These values and preferences are drivers for the employers

millennials choose but also factors for why millennials choose to leave those employers. The most common values and preferences of the millennial generation include meaningful work (Wesner & Miller, 2008), work-life balance, professional development, mentorship and feedback, collaboration, diversity, and inclusion (Gorman et al., 2004), technology (Skiba & Barton, 2006), and advancement pathways (Pasko et al., 2020). Millennials often seek work that has a positive impact on society or aligns with their values. Millennials value clear career paths and opportunities for advancement (Bell & Griffin, 2013). They are more likely to stay in a job where they can see a trajectory for growth.

At their current stage in life, millennials fundamentally think about their role as a stepping-stone and a growth opportunity, but they also want to feel deeply committed to their role and to work for a manager who will invest in their development, which isn't entirely different from what other generations value (Rigoni & Adkins, 2016). Research shows that having a great manager and being part of a great management culture is important to all employees. However, millennials place a greater emphasis on opportunities to learn and grow and opportunities for advancement.

Millennials tend to seek work environments that align with their values and offer a sense of purpose and meaning in their roles (Wesner & Miller, 2008). If the organizational culture is not inclusive, innovative, or supportive of employee well-being, millennials may feel disconnected and seek employment elsewhere (Kleinhans et al., 2014). A lack of diversity and inclusivity in leadership positions within higher education institutions can create a perception of limited opportunities for millennials from diverse backgrounds to advance into leadership roles. This lack of representation may discourage millennials from envisioning a long-term career within the organization. Millennials place a high value on continuous learning and professional

development (Wesner & Miller, 2008). Organizations that do not invest in training and growth opportunities may experience higher turnover among millennial employees who seek organizations that prioritize their ongoing development.

Comparison of Findings: Millennials are “playing the game” to Literature.

Due to the highly social nature of followership and follower role construction, study participants acknowledge that part of advancing in higher education means identifying what the expectations are and conforming to them. One study participant referred to advancing in higher education as “playing the game”. Participants are aware of what it takes to take advantage of opportunities for advancement in their environments and they believe much of that has to do with leadership expectations, power and authority, and organizational culture.

Social construction theory suggests that followership roles and expectations are socially constructed and influenced by cultural norms, organizational dynamics, and leadership practices (Carsten et al., 2010). How followers are expected to behave, interact with leaders, and contribute to the organization is shaped by social expectations and historical patterns.

Participants shared that in order to advance in certain areas and roles current leadership had certain expectations of the person that was to assume said role seemingly based solely on the history of the predecessors. Followership is closely tied to power and authority dynamics within social structures (Courpasson & Dany, 2003). Social construction theory recognizes that the perception of leaders' power and authority, as well as followers' responses to this power, are socially constructed and influenced by the context in which they operate. Perception of power and authority and responses to power and authority are key factors for followers who desire advancement in higher education. Study participants mentioned power and authority dynamics in relation to executive leadership rather than their direct supervisors. The sentiment was almost as

if the “real boss” was responsible for promotion and advancement and therefore participants would need to cater to the higherups versus just making a good impression on their direct supervisor. One study participant said promotion and advancement from that standpoint are even more difficult when you do not have and cannot cultivate a relationship with next-level leadership which makes having a supervisor that will advocate for you even more important.

Lastly, organizational culture plays a significant role in shaping followership behaviors and attitudes (Louis, 1980). Social construction theory highlights how shared beliefs, values, and norms within an organization influence how followers perceive their roles and contribute to the leadership process. The study participants ranged in age and experience with their institutions, and this became a qualifying factor when discussions about the influence of organizational culture came up. For those newer to their roles and organizations organizational culture was more of a buzz word for institutional politics whereas those with more longevity within their organizations noted the evolution of their beliefs and values relative to the organization. However, all participants were able to reorganize how their organization’s culture played a role in promotion and advancement practices. For example, many participants noted that it was the norm for a person to be promoted based on seniority rather than any notable change in their qualifications. One participant questioned their direct supervisor about the qualifications for the next opportunity for advancement and was told they needed a certain amount of time in their current position before they would be considered. When asked if there was another way the supervisor said, “I don’t know that’s just what’s always happened.”

Study findings related to: The challenges millennials encounter when implementing the Reversing the Lens approach in their career development efforts at universities.

1. Existing challenges revolve around rigidity and tradition, with some progression but not enough.
2. Trying to leverage good relationships with supervisors.
3. Most would like to stay in higher education, but they understand they may find fulfillment elsewhere and they are open to that.

Comparison of Findings: Existing challenges revolve around rigidity and tradition, with some progression but not enough to Literature.

Educational institutions must adapt to rapid changes in technology, pedagogy, and student expectations. Leaders need to foster a culture of innovation and flexibility to stay ahead. Furthermore, higher education institutions often have a complexity brought about by the competing internal cultures and structures and the variety of external stakeholders that exert a pull on the institution's resources and attention. Still implementing outdated procedures, aging leadership, and institutional rigidity are major factors in many of the challenges shared by the study participants. Participants cited organizational culture, politics, stagnant leadership, hierarchy, and lack of inclusion as challenges that have faced whether trying to participate in the leadership process or during their career planning.

Participants understand the current avenues for advancement and acknowledge that they need revision as they do not align with their perspectives and other industry practices. Aging leadership was a factor in comments about stagnant leadership, specifically the conflicts between older generations and younger generations. Generational differences in work attitudes and ethics can cause conflicts, particularly if one generation perceives another as lacking dedication or being overly rigid. Generations may have differing expectations of leadership styles, causing friction between those who prefer traditional hierarchical leadership and those who value a more

inclusive approach (Galdames & Guihen, 2022). Lastly, institutional rigidity related to policy and procedure is a sticking point for many millennials. Many conflicts arise in the areas of work-life balance, technology integration, creation of feedback culture, and emphasizing inclusive leadership when it comes to lack of organizational adaptation. The age and history of many institutions of higher education create some resistance to change and entrenched organizational culture can compound that. However, as the educational and environmental landscape continues to evolve so must colleges and universities. This factor contributes significantly to the named challenges the study participants have experienced and the challenges existing in the literature as well. Some institutions' refusal to adapt and inclination to double down on history and tradition are costing them financially through turnover, workforce shortages, and compromised administrative capability.

Progression is paramount given the current educational, social, and economic landscape. As much as inclusivity, collaboration, engagement, and willingness for change are significant to millennials' work preferences they are integral to the society in which these organizations operate. Millennials understand the environments in which they thrive and are unwilling to stay on a sinking ship. They acknowledge the progress that has been made so far and while it is worthy it is not enough. Colleges and universities must be willing to make the investments in change and adaptation in order to survive the changes ahead both internally and externally.

Comparison of Findings: Trying to leverage good relationships with supervisors to Literature.

Research shows that the quality of the leader-follower relationship is reliably linked to follower well-being and performance (Martin et al., 2010). The dynamics of the leader-follower interaction are often characterized as a relationship because the emphasis is placed on mutual

influence. A good quality relationship between a leader and a follower is characterized by high trust, mutual influence, reciprocal liking, mutual disclosure of information, responsiveness, synchronized plans and goals, support, and an appreciation of the relationship (Boyd & Taylor, 1998). The core premise of the Reversing the Lens approach is to reverse the traditional focus solely on leaders and redirect attention to the followers. Shamir's approach highlights that leadership is a dynamic and mutually influential process between leaders and followers. Rather than a one-way flow of influence from leaders to followers, the approach recognizes that followers can impact leaders' decisions and behaviors. Upward influence was a reoccurring theme through the participant interviews. The participants described the leadership process as a mutual exchange of influence and acknowledged that they felt they had an influence on their leader's decision-making behavior when they were included in the process. Many participants also acknowledged their leaders showing an appreciation for their input on projects, meetings, and procedures. The number one response to the question of how does your leader make space for you to show up as a follower was, they ask for feedback and input.

Participants further acknowledged what facets of a good leader/follower relationship look like and the influence of that on not only their current work but how they view their career development. Participants cited support, encouragement, and empowerment among the top facets that create a good working relationship with their leader. These characteristics are considered when assessing other job opportunities both internal and external to their organization and affect the level of engagement and satisfaction they feel in their current positions. Research shows that relationship development, workplace climate, and learning opportunities were central themes in improving employee engagement (Shuck, Rocco, & Albornoz, 2009). The benefits of engaged employees include increased employee loyalty, increased productivity, higher sales and profits,

and improved organizational culture (Attridge, 2009). Involving employees in problem-solving within the organization contributes to a divestiture of power which allows employees to gain a sense of responsibility and pride in both their daily jobs and situational contributions (Pasmore, Friedlander, 1982). For participants who experienced a lack of support or empowerment from their leaders, they looked at their positions as nothing more than just a job with no aspirations to develop personally or professionally within the organization. For participants with support and empowerment from their leaders, they were more likely to engage in both personal and professional development through the organization and mentioned an increase in pride and connection to their organizations overall. Followership challenges the traditional notion of leaders holding all the power and followers being subservient. Reversing the Lens allows leaders to empower their followers by giving them autonomy and responsibility within their roles. This empowerment enhances followers' sense of ownership and contribution (Sharmir, 2007).

Comparison of Findings: Most would like to stay in higher education, but they understand they may find fulfillment elsewhere and they are open to that to Literature.

Millennials value meaningful work and are more likely to engage when they see a clear purpose in what they do (Wesner & Miller, 2008). A 2022 survey from the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) found that nearly 60% of employees were likely to look for employment elsewhere in the next year. The main concerns shared by higher education professionals in this survey were lack of advancement opportunities, the desire for promotion and more responsibility, and lack of meaningful work.

Study participants acknowledged that advancement in higher education is unlike other industries and also acknowledged that the propensity to cling to tradition and outdated operations is a reality in higher education as well. These factors make leaving the industry very attractive.



Shifts in career models have resulted from both environmental factors and shifts in employee attitudes toward work and life. Difficult financial conditions and economic lows coupled with longer life spans have impacted older workers causing an extension of working life and an aging workforce (Browning & Silver, 2008). There has been an increase in dual-income households as well as single-working parents. People are realizing the need for continuous education and development to remain competitive while also realizing organizations are becoming less capable of fulfilling their economic and psychological needs (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008). With organizations becoming less fulfilling, leaner, and flatter with limited upward advancement opportunities individuals are becoming more transactional in their actions with their employers, with fewer employees defining their identities through their organizations and growing more distant and less loyal (Laud & Johnson, 2012). Taking primary responsibility for personal needs and career advancement is becoming more paramount for those who have been disappointed by organizational practices. Millennials are career-building, highly educated, and are unwilling to settle for work environments that are not conducive to the lives they are leading. Millennials are more attuned and sensitive to their surroundings and environment, and they are more engaged (Wingard, 2022). This alone makes events like the Great Resignation more poignant and impactful and forces leaders to view solutions differently.

Unlike other generations, millennials understand their influence as followers and recognize the opportunities for increased engagement and to co-construct the leadership process. Traditional hierarchies are becoming less common in organizations creating the opportunity for all levels of the organization to participate in decision-making, policy changes, and organizational operations. Higher education is notoriously slow to adapt, and many millennials are not waiting around for the change. Since the systematic examination of millennials' career

decision-making has been limited (AbouAssi et al., 2019) studies that examine generational and workforce preferences and trends are paramount for retention strategies and workplace maintenance, and institutions of higher education are not an exception.

### Discussion of Findings

Generally, the study findings were significant in that there are noteworthy parallels that can be drawn from the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach to leadership practice, emergence, and development in higher education and in doing so one can see the influence of this practice on millennial followers in how they construct their roles as followers, behave in their organizations, and plan for advancement either internally or external to their organizations. The findings offer crucial insight into the millennial generation as followers and potential leaders and the strategies that are integral to maintaining and attracting this generation to one's organization. Lastly, these findings show a significant need for flexibility and adaptation among institutions of higher education. The sections following will analyze the findings further by each guiding question.

#### *Analysis of findings: Guiding Question #1*

The first guiding question was how millennials perceive and interpret the Reversing the Lens approach in relation to their career aspirations and growth development within university environments. The essence of this question centers on millennials identifying the Reversing the Lens approach and its role in their career development practices even without knowing the name or that it is a type of followership method. Participants were able to readily identify aspects of their contributions to the leadership process as followers that showcases they understand and appreciate this approach for its emphasis on followers as active participants in the leadership process rather than passive recipients. When describing their ideas about what a follower is, and

the perception of the leader/follower dynamic participants used imagery to convey mutual influence, co-construction, inclusivity, collaboration, and shared vision. Participants were vocal in their experiences where these characteristics were a part of their supervisor's leadership practice and experiences where they were not, but the participants wished they were. The study participants were knowledgeable about environments where collaboration and inclusivity created positive outcomes and advocated for these environments to be the norm. Shamir's (2007) Reversing the Lens approach was not identified by name, but the foundations and aspects of this method are alive and well in the actions of millennials and the expectations they have for their work environments and preferred leadership styles.

Participants acknowledge that working in an environment where Reversing the Lens is practiced affects the way in which they think and plan for their careers. Leaders who practice Reversing the Lens have positive impacts on how followers identify and construct their roles. It influences the attributes participants look for in job opportunities both internal and external to their organizations and influences how they go about obtaining these opportunities. Leaders and organizations that are more open and receptive to the Reversing the Lens approach are more attractive to millennials who look for and thrive in inclusive, feedback-oriented, and change-positive environments. Participants acknowledged that the characteristics that are foundational to Reversing the Lens are characteristics that would make most organizations places where they could be retained and maintained. These findings are most noteworthy because the core foundations of the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach are agreeable with many millennial characteristics as a generation and align with the preferences millennials look for in organizations.

*Analysis of findings: Guiding Question #2*

The second guiding question was what are the current avenues for career advancement in universities and do they resonate with millennials? This question was foundational to the research study because it asks how are professionals in the university setting developing their careers and are these avenues that can work for millennials. The findings show that the current avenues for advancement are rooted in seniority-based promotion versus merit-based promotion. This is a conflict for millennials in that one of the strategies millennials use for advancement and promotion is acquiring more education, skills, and professional development. Since advancement practices are seemingly based on longevity with the organization regardless of skill or other educational requirements millennials find obtaining promotions in the university environment difficult.

These findings stand out more so due to how career development has changed from generation to generation. More recent career models consider and expect multiple job moves but encourage nonlinear job routes. Lateral or horizontal career movement requires functional diversity and multi-company/department experiences which all require highly comprehensive skills to facilitate career movement not just deeper job knowledge. Working your way up the hierarchy is not the only route professionals take when considering options for career development. Millennials also do not build positional longevity in the ways baby boomers and other generations have. Promotion based on years of service may have worked for older generations whose goal was to get an entry-level job, work their way up, and then retire after thirty years, but that is not the case for millennials. Millennials, like any generation, have diverse needs and aspirations when it comes to their jobs (Rigoni & Adkins, 2016). However, certain values and preferences are often associated with millennials in the workforce. These values and

preferences are drivers for the employers millennials choose but also factors for why millennials choose to leave those employers.

*Analysis of findings: Guiding Question #3*

The third and final guiding question was what challenges do millennials encounter when implementing the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach in their career development efforts at universities? The findings here were a direct result of the conflict between how institutions of higher education are slow to adapt and the values and preferences of the millennial generation. Historically, colleges and universities are hierarchical in design and structure which influences leadership practices, change management, and organizational member participation and engagement. The millennial desire for work to flow out of the life they are building influences the environment millennials expect at work. Millennials by virtue of the experiences that shape this generation are open to and expect collaboration, inclusivity, and the opportunity to affect change in their organizations. In the age of social media, millennials are well aware of the influence they wield as followers and expect organizations to recognize and offer an environment where that influence can be used and accepted.

By relying on a hierarchical nature colleges and universities create an environment where followers are meant to be compliant and supportive rather than aid in the decision-making and offer alternatives. Followers are meant to be seen and not heard. Challenging the status quo is not tolerated and leaders know best or else they would not occupy the positions they do. These outmoded ways of thinking and operating create many conflicts in the workplace environment which cause retention issues and discourage millennials from building longevity within higher education. Millennials value workplaces that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion. They want to work in environments that respect and celebrate different backgrounds and perspectives.

However, in environments that refuse to look past the hierarchy, it is difficult to create inclusive environments where everyone regardless of where you fall in the hierarchy can contribute and thrive.

Much of the rigidity present in institutions of higher education lies in entrenched ideas of tradition and history all of which affect culture. Further still, because advancement practices are based on longevity there is rarely a chance for new blood to enter higher in the ranks to challenge entrenched culture and old fashion ideals and millennials are not sticking around long enough to create longevity to challenge these ideals either. One resounding theme that was evident in the findings was that the issues are cyclical. One issue or conflict feeds right into another. The rigidity of operations in colleges and universities contributes to outdated advancement practices which contributes to millennials the largest generation in the workforce being unable to properly develop their careers which contributes to retention issues and staff shortages for these same colleges and universities. Furthermore, the fix seems to be fairly simple. Current leadership needs to embrace flexibility and inclusivity from the largest portion of their workforce that just wants to make a difference and be fulfilled by their work. Millennials do not want to job-hop or not build career longevity, but they want to do it in an environment that aligns with their values and allows them to gain meaning and fulfillment.

#### Relationship to Literature

Overall, the findings were in alignment with the literature in respect to millennial characteristics and preferences, strategies and solutions for talent acquisition and retention, and the current focus on inclusivity and engagement in the workplace. To reiterate the millennial generation is not a monolith and no one experience can sum up the experiences of each individual person however, through the findings we see strong support for the literature on the

nature of millennials in the workplace, their expectations of the work environment and of their leaders, and how they plan their careers. There is also significant insight that supports the increasing importance of a focus on followership and its influence on leadership, not just leadership's influence on followers. The paradigm shift in perspective of power and influence dynamics is present in how people enact the follower role, their expectations of how, when, and where followers contribute to the leadership process, and the outcomes of these behaviors. Barbara Kellerman's (2008) warning to leaders not to ignore their followers is manifesting in very real ways for organizations both positively and negatively.

The study findings offered avenues of focus in some of the gaps in the literature to include the role of followers in leadership emergence, follower agency and influence, and follower contributions to leadership development. The findings support Shamir's (2007) notion for Reversing the Lens that effective leadership involves not only understanding the behaviors and traits of leaders but also comprehending the perspective, needs, and behaviors of followers. Followers can be change agents and this is a desire for millennials. Lastly, while understanding that there is a disconnect between current advancement practices in higher education and how millennials career build there is significant evidence to show that Reversing the Lens and followership are avenues worth exploring to build stronger retention strategies and attract and maintain a workforce. The Reversing the Lens approach emphasizes the importance of creating an inclusive and supportive environment where followers feel empowered to express their perspectives, voice concerns, and collaborate with leaders. By understanding followers' needs, aspirations, and expectations, leaders can create strategies and initiatives that resonate with their followers and lead to more effective leadership outcomes.

## Conclusions

This research centered on the millennial generation and whether a followership method such as Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) could influence their strategies for career development in higher education. The data collected helped showcase who millennials are, their position and importance in today's workforce, what they want, and how they go about obtaining it. The findings aligned well with the current research and literature on the millennial generation in relation to who they are and what they want. Ultimately, it can be concluded that it would be detrimental for leadership to ignore the values and preferences of the millennial workforce. Shifting leadership practices to those that put emphasis on a co-constructed leadership process, inclusivity, and collaboration aligns with millennial values and preferences and can inform strategies for retention and talent acquisition. Although organizational culture can stem from many places and inform many practices, so does leadership. Leadership practices affect environments, relationships, viewpoints, engagement, productivity, and outcomes. While a one size fits all approach is near impossible and frankly not ideal, open-mindedness and flexibility can go a long way in meeting the needs of your followers.

### *Discussion of Implications*

The findings of this study further inform fields of study and behavior associated with career development and leadership emergence in higher education, followership development in organizations, and retention strategies and succession planning for organizations. Study findings have particular implications for practice and research, as well as related leadership, learning, and service.

#### Implications for Practice

##### *Implication One*

#### Retention Strategies and Talent Acquisition:



Followership and approaches such as Shamir's (2007) Reversing the Lens allow for followers to participate and engage in the leadership process including decision-making, policy and procedure formation, and strategic planning. Followership promotes the idea of creating inclusive and collaborative environments where diversity is welcomed from diversity of thought and ideas to diversity of position and title. These areas of focus align perfectly with the characteristics and preferences of the millennial generation. Since millennials are the majority of the workforce adapting to include their values and preferences in the work environment is a must to attract and maintain this generation. Therefore, retention strategies and talent acquisition need to incorporate the ideals of followership to include empowerment, collaboration, inclusivity, engagement, recognition, and development.

That might look like:

**Empowerment and Engagement:**

Retention Strategy: Organizations that foster a culture of followership where employees feel empowered and engaged are likely to experience higher retention rates.

Talent Acquisition: Prospective employees are attracted to organizations that emphasize employee engagement and empowerment, making the organization more appealing in the talent market.

**Recognition and Appreciation:**

Retention Strategy: Followers who feel recognized and appreciated are more likely to stay with an organization.

Talent Acquisition: Organizations known for valuing and acknowledging the contributions of their followers are likely to attract top talent seeking a positive and supportive work environment.

### **Leadership Development Opportunities:**

Retention Strategy: Providing leadership development opportunities for followers contributes to their professional growth and enhances job satisfaction, leading to higher retention.

Talent Acquisition: Organizations offering clear pathways for leadership development attract ambitious individuals looking for opportunities to grow and advance in their careers.

### **Collaborative and Inclusive Culture:**

Retention Strategy: A culture that values followership fosters collaboration and inclusivity, contributing to a positive work environment that encourages employees to stay.

Talent Acquisition: Organizations with a reputation for inclusivity and collaboration are likely to attract diverse talent seeking a supportive workplace culture.

### **Professional Development Programs:**

Retention Strategy: Offering ongoing professional development programs demonstrates an investment in the growth and skills enhancement of followers, enhancing retention.

Talent Acquisition: Prospective employees are drawn to organizations that prioritize professional development, seeing it as an opportunity for continuous learning and career advancement.

By focusing on followership, organizations not only enhance their retention strategies but also create an attractive proposition for talent acquisition. This is particularly important for industries like higher education experiencing staff shortages and aging working populations. Current practices are not working. A positive followership culture contributes to a workplace where individuals thrive, collaborate, and find long-term fulfillment in their roles.

*Implication Two*

### Leadership Development and Succession Planning:

Leadership development in the context of followership involves fostering skills, attitudes, and behaviors that enable individuals to effectively contribute as followers while also understanding the dynamics of leadership. This approach recognizes that effective followership is an essential component of overall organizational success. Incorporating leadership development within the followership framework fosters a well-rounded approach to individual and organizational growth. It recognizes that effective followers contribute to the success of leaders and the organization as a whole, ultimately enhancing the overall leadership ecosystem. Leadership development in followership encourages active engagement, critical thinking, and effective communication. Leadership development encourages followers to actively engage in their roles.

Succession planning is a strategic process that extends beyond identifying potential leaders; it requires a forward-thinking approach that anticipates leadership needs, identifies high-potential individuals, and prepares them for future responsibilities. The importance of succession planning can be explained by the gaps left in employment by older generations retiring and retention issues. Succession planning and management can be used by industries to address these gaps by developing internal talent to fill potential leadership and administrative openings. Applying followership approaches in these instances helps the succession planning process by having a readily available pool of qualified followers to fill these gaps.

### *Implication Three*

#### Leaders as Mentors and Co-Learners:

Followership values continuous learning which places leaders and followers in a mentorship relationship where both parties can contribute to each other's development. Leaders

recognizing the value of followers as co-learners should adopt mentoring roles. This involves creating opportunities for mentorship and fostering a culture where leaders learn from the insights and experiences of their followers. This in turn promotes more healthy relationships between leaders and their followers. Millennials value relationship-based working environments and opportunities to learn from their leaders in their career planning and development. The creation of a co-learning climate helps address the issues of limited engagement and participation and helps promote a more inclusive environment which can influence the overall campus climate and the potential for innovative and student-centered approaches to higher education.

### Implications for Leadership

#### *Implication One*

##### Followership Practiced in Tandem with Leadership:

A further exploration of the synergies between leadership and followership is necessary which could contribute to a more holistic understanding of leadership processes. Both practice and study could benefit from an integration of followership and leadership perspectives, it underscores the interconnectedness of these roles. By incorporating followership into leadership practices, it reinforces the idea that leadership is not a one-way process but can flow in all directions. This approach could allow for more understanding of non-following behaviors as well as non-effective leadership.

#### *Implication Two*

##### Empowerment for Innovation:

Followership that encourages innovation and creative problem-solving can positively impact an organization's ability to adapt and improve. Leaders should empower followers by providing them with the autonomy to contribute innovative ideas and solutions. This requires a

leadership approach that values diverse perspectives and encourages risk-taking. Organizations with empowerment climates can positively influence job satisfaction and performance by sharing power and information among all organizational members. Leader behavior likely plays a significant role in these contexts either encouraging or discouraging followers' behaviors. In an empowering climate, leaders might encourage more participation from followers through power sharing which grants autonomy and intrinsic motivation allowing for increased efficacy and better performance.

### *Implication Three*

#### Service as a Shared Mission:

Followership values service and can transform service delivery into a shared mission rather than a task solely for leaders. Leaders should communicate and reinforce the importance of service as a shared organizational mission. This involves creating a shared vision where followers understand their role in delivering excellent service. By creating this understanding followers can visualize their role in the transformation process and take pride in the outcomes. In essence, the relationship between followership and leadership in the realms of learning and service underscores the importance of collaboration, shared responsibility, and a continuous commitment to growth and improvement. Leaders who recognize and leverage the strengths of followers in these areas can create dynamic and adaptive organizations.

#### Implications for Research

### *Implication One*

#### Career Development Lifecycle:

Career planning and development in an organization is an evaluation process of the development opportunities within the organization and alignment with the personal aspirations of

the employee. Occupational preferences and competencies, along with an individual's life situations, all change with time and experience, which may or may not correspond to chronological age. Organizations would benefit from incorporating career development lifecycles into their strategic human resources practices as a way to monitor and pivot for those employees who are actively career planning. Understanding that a person's career phase and age may not line up when planning for their next job move is imperative for retention activities in organizations. People seek career satisfaction through work roles in which they can express themselves and further implement and develop their self-concept. Key aspects of professional career development include skill enhancement, continuous learning, networking, mentoring and coaching, work-life balance, and feedback seeking. Each of these aspects can be found within the framework of followership and approaches such as Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007). Followership is not isolated just to areas of leadership but can be extended to inform areas of human resources that affect employee development and well-being.

### *Implication Two*

#### Follower Characteristics as Contributors to Organizational Outcomes:

The leadership process signifies a connectionist view that sees leadership as a system involving leaders or leading and followers or following interacting together. This definition identifies followership in two ways followership as a position or role and followership as a social process. Followership is a relationally based process that includes how followers and leaders interact to construct leadership and its outcomes. The variables for followership characteristics include follower traits, motivations, perceptions, and constructions. These various characteristics contribute to organizational outcomes in various ways. For example, followers who are adaptable and flexible contribute to organizational agility and resilience. In times of change or uncertainty,

adaptable followers can help the organization navigate challenges and seize new opportunities. Followers who possess innovative and creative thinking can contribute to problem-solving and innovation. These followers may generate new ideas, contribute to product or process improvement, and foster a culture of continuous innovation within the organization. Followers who demonstrate leadership potential can contribute to succession planning and leadership development. Identifying and nurturing leadership qualities in followers ensures a pipeline of future leaders, enhancing organizational continuity and resilience. Lastly, followers who are committed and loyal contribute to organizational stability. High levels of commitment and loyalty among followers result in lower turnover rates, which can positively impact organizational continuity and employee morale. The impact of followers and their characteristics on organizational outcomes cannot be overstated but can get lost when the focus is solely on leaders.

### *Implication Three*

#### Millennial Leadership Practices:

Millennials have had a significant impact on leadership practices and development in the workplace, driving changes in how leadership is approached and executed. Some key effects include incorporating the collaborative leadership style, emphasizing purpose, a renewed focus on work-life balance, technology integration, creation of feedback culture, emphasizing inclusive leadership, and recognizing the importance of authenticity. Are millennials breaking the cycle of traditional leadership and incorporating the aspects of leadership that they have been drivers for as followers? As millennials assume leadership positions and incorporate these ideals and aspects into their leadership practice, career planning and development could take a shift and the characteristics of millennials as job-hoppers could become a thing of the past.

### *Future Research*

1. Millennial leaders in higher education.

An exploration of millennial leadership practices could be beneficial to understand if the preferences millennials expect in the workplace are carried into their own leadership practices and how and if they resonate with other millennials and generation z.

2. Exploration of Followership in non-traditional organizations.

Study followership in non-traditional organizational structures, such as flat organizations, holacracy, or decentralized networks. Explore how followership operates in these alternative organizational models.

3. Followership in non-traditional leadership contexts.

Most followership research has focused on formal organizational settings. More research is needed to understand followership dynamics in non-traditional contexts, such as social movements, volunteer organizations, and virtual teams. With the rise of remote work and virtual teams, study how followership manifests in virtual environments. Explore the challenges and opportunities associated with followership in digital spaces.

4. Intersectionality and Followership.

Explore how intersectionality (the interconnected nature of social categories like race, gender, and class) intersects with followership experiences. Investigate how multiple identity factors influence followership dynamics.

5. Technology and Followership.

Investigate the impact of technology on followership behaviors. Explore how digital tools, social media, and artificial intelligence influence the way followers engage with leaders and participate in organizational processes.



6. Longitudinal studies of Followership.

Conduct longitudinal studies to track changes in followership behaviors over time.

Explore how followership evolves in response to organizational changes, leadership transitions, and external factors.

7. Followership and organizational performance.

Examine the link between followership behaviors and organizational performance metrics. Investigate how effective followership contributes to innovation, productivity, and overall organizational success.

*Summary and Concluding Remarks*

In conclusion, this study delves into the influence of the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach to followership on the career advancement strategies of millennials within the unique context of the university setting. The exploration of this approach has unearthed several key findings that hold implications for both academic discourse and practical applications in organizational leadership. As this chapter draws to a close, let us reflect on the key takeaways.

The purpose of this study was to understand how millennials perceive and experience followership within the university context, how this approach influences their career decision-making processes, and how it shapes their strategies for professional growth and advancement with three guiding questions that supported the main research question. Through a qualitative phenomenological study utilizing a per-interview questionnaire and in-person interviews, millennial participants' lived experiences and narratives were explored to produce some significant findings. Those findings included how the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach was being practiced in university settings and that millennials recognized and appreciated the approach and its application. This approach incorporates many preferences and

characteristics that appeal to millennials. The leader/follower relationship in the university setting is significant to millennials as it pertains to the influence on their work and their career development. Leaders do have an impact on how millennials view their roles in their organizations and how they show up in those roles. Creating a positive and sustainable leader/follower relationship is important to millennials and influences the way they make plans and decisions about their careers. Lastly, millennials understand and are aware of the current practices for advancement in higher education and while these practices do not resonate with millennials some are willing to work within the system to stay in the higher education industry, but many are not and are actively seeking opportunities in other industries.

Overall it was concluded that followership and the Reversing the Lens (Shamir, 2007) approach are methods that have many positive implications for practice, leadership, and research including retention strategies and talent acquisition, leadership development and succession planning, leaders as mentors and co-learners, the case for followership to be practiced and study along with leadership, empowerment for innovation, service as a shared mission, career development lifecycle, a call for acknowledgment of follower characteristics and their contribution to organizational outcomes, and finally millennial leadership practices. The chapter is rounded out by suggestions for future research in the area of followership and leadership to include millennials as leaders in higher education, followership in non-traditional organizations, followership in non-traditional leadership contexts, intersectionality and technology in followership, a suggestion for longitudinal studies on followership, and lastly followership and its relationship to organizational performance.

In essence, this study unfolds the potential of the Reversing the Lens approach as a catalyst for transformative followership in the career advancement journeys of millennials in

university settings. As we conclude this chapter, the call to action is clear: to continue unraveling the intricacies of followership, refining leadership practices, and paving the way for the next generation of leaders in academia.

## Supplemental Dissertation Information

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## IV. Tables

Table 2.1

	Reversing the Lens Approach (Shamir, 2007)	Co-Created Leadership Process (Uhl-Bein et al., 2014)
Focus	Primarily emphasizes shifting the perspective from a leader-centric view to a more balanced view that includes the active roles of followers.	Goes a step further by exploring how leaders and followers collaboratively construct leadership experiences.
Core Idea	Followers are not passive recipients of leadership but actively contribute to the leadership dynamic and its outcomes.	Leadership is an outcome of joint efforts, where leaders and followers co-create meaning, roles, and processes.
Primary Objective	Challenge the traditional top-down understanding of leadership and recognize followers as co-producers of leadership processes.	To study the intricate dynamics between leaders and followers in the process of constructing leadership, considering how their interactions shape the leadership narrative.
Implication	Emphasizes the need to study and understand the interactions, behaviors, and motivations of both leaders and followers in leadership situations.	Encourages investigating how leaders and followers collectively shape leadership by negotiating meanings, roles, and actions in real-time.

Table 2.1: Framework Comparison

Table 4.1

Demographic	Number of Participants
Millennial Age Range	42-29
Years Represented	1981, 1982, 1985, 1986, 1988, 1990-1994
Gender	38% Male 62% Female
Educational Background/Level	15% High School Diploma 31% Bachelor's Degree 54% Advanced Degree (Master's or higher)
Race	8% Mixed Race 38% Black 54% White
Job Title	31% Support Staff 23% Assistant/Associate Director 8% Director 23% Assistant/Associate Dean 15% Dean
Marital Status	46% Single 54% Married
Years of Experience in Higher Ed (Range)	19 years–2 years

Table 4.1 Participant Demographics

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## VI. Figures

Figure 3.1 Research Timeline





## VII. Definition of Terms Section

### Definitions of Terms

*Career advancement:* The upward trajectory of a person's professional journey.

*Employee turnover:* The rate at which employees leave a workforce and are replaced.

*Epistemology:* This is the study of the nature of knowledge and justification. There are many theories of epistemology. For example, empiricist epistemology argues that knowledge is derived from sense experience.

*Followership theory:* This is a process whereby an individual or individuals accept the influence of others to accomplish a common goal.

*Follower:* Subordinates who have less power, authority, and influence than their superiors and who, therefore, usually, but not invariably, fall into line.

*Leader:* A person who leads or commands a group, organization, or country.

*Millennial:* Anyone born between 1980 and 1995.

*Reversing the Lens:* An approach to followership that first addresses the impact of followers' characteristics on followers' behaviors. Second, the impact of followers' behaviors on leaders' perceptions and behavior and the impact of the leaders' perceptions and behavior on followers' behaviors, and third, the effect of both followers and leaders on followership outcomes.

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