

Leadership Fit and Job Satisfaction among Swedish Generation Z workers

A quantitative study of the association of fit between preferred and experienced leadership and job satisfaction among Swedish Generation Z employees.

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Abstract

As Generation Z enters the labour market, employers face growing concerns over lower job satisfaction, reduced engagement and rising turnover intentions in this cohort. Existing research has identified leadership as an important predictor of job satisfaction, while also showing that Generation Z employees hold relatively distinct leadership preferences compared to older generations. Research also identifies differences in terms of workplace expectations between Generation Z and previous generations. Less attention, however, has been paid to the alignment between the leadership Generation Z employees prefer and the leadership they experience. This study examines whether such alignment is associated with job satisfaction among Swedish Generation Z workers. Drawing on Person-Environment Fit theory and the Full Range Leadership Model, the study uses a quantitative cross-sectional survey of 108 employed Swedish Generation Z respondents. Leadership fit was operationalised in two complementary ways: perceived fit, in which respondents directly rated the match between their preferred and experienced leadership style, and subjective fit, constructed indirectly by comparing separate ratings of preferred and experienced leadership. Both operationalisations indicated a significant positive relationship between leadership fit and job satisfaction. Perceived fit explained 34.8% of the variance in job satisfaction, while subjective fit produced a smaller but statistically significant difference between fit and misfit groups. The findings extend leadership-fit logic to employee-supervisor contexts in an early-career workforce and suggest that part of the lower job satisfaction documented among Generation Z may reflect a structural mismatch between leadership preferences and leadership received, rather than a generational attitude problem alone.

Keywords

Generation Z, leadership fit, job satisfaction, person-environment fit, Full Range Leadership Model

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The workforce is changing as Generation Z, defined as those born between 1997 and 2012, enters the labour market and is expected to become a major segment of the workforce. This generation has grown up in a context shaped by rapid technological change, digitalisation, economic instability, the COVID-19 pandemic and social justice movements, all of which may have influenced how Generation Z view work and leadership (Ie et al., 2026; Seemiller & Grace, 2017; Maříková et al., 2025).

As Generation Z enters the workforce, problems are emerging. Recent studies report lower levels of job satisfaction, reduced engagement and behaviours such as “quiet quitting”, where younger employees limit their effort to the minimum required (Bazargan et al., 2025; Saraiva & Nogueiro, 2025). Survey evidence such as the Cigna Well-being Survey found that Generation Z scored below the global average on job satisfaction compared to older generations (Cigna, 2022). These patterns suggest that the workplace experience of this cohort needs closer examination and raise the question of which organisational and managerial factors are most strongly implicated. The literature reviewed in Section 2 addresses two such factors, leadership style and the expectations Generation Z hold of leadership. This in turn identifies a specific gap that the present study is designed to address.

1.2 Research gap and aim

Although previous research has shown that leadership styles influence job satisfaction and that Generation Z employees may hold distinct expectations regarding leadership, less attention has been given to the alignment between employees’ preferred leadership style and the leadership they experience in the workplace. Existing research indicates that unmet expectations and inadequate leadership can contribute to disengagement and lower job satisfaction, patterns that have been observed among Generation Z employees. However, these factors have largely been examined separately. As a result, there is limited understanding of whether the match or mismatch between preferred and experienced leadership styles is associated with job satisfaction. This gap may be particularly relevant

in the context of Swedish Generation Z workers, where differences in leadership preferences have been identified but not directly linked to experienced leadership and satisfaction outcomes.

Therefore, this study aims to examine whether alignment between employees' preferred leadership style and experienced leadership style is associated with job satisfaction among Swedish Generation Z workers.

1.3 Research question

To what extent is alignment between preferred and experienced leadership styles associated with job satisfaction among Swedish Generation Z workers?

1.4 Delimitation

This study is delimited in three respects. First, it focuses exclusively on employees belonging to Generation Z, defined as those born between 1997 and 2012. Older generational cohorts are not included, and the findings should not be generalised beyond this group. Second, the study is geographically limited to employees working in Sweden, which constrains generalisation to other national or cultural contexts in which leadership norms and Generation Z expectations may differ. Third, leadership is examined through the lens of the Full Range Leadership Model and classified into three broad styles, transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire, rather than through the full multidimensional MLQ instrument or alternative frameworks such as ethical, servant, or authentic leadership. The study therefore captures broad leadership patterns rather than fine-grained behavioural detail, and its conclusions should be read accordingly.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Leadership styles and job satisfaction

Prior research shows that leadership style is an important predictor of job satisfaction across organisational contexts. Studies grounded in the Full Range Leadership Model have shown that leadership style predicts job satisfaction among public sector employees (Barasa & Kariuki, 2025), while longitudinal evidence from frontline service employees suggests that both transformational and transactional leadership styles are positively associated with job satisfaction and job performance (Aburumman & Alrweis, 2025). Similar patterns have been reported in educational settings (Alonderienė & Majauskaitė, 2016).

The dominant pattern in this literature is therefore clear: more active and engaged leadership styles, such as transformational and transactional, are positively associated with job satisfaction. What this literature has largely treated as a property of the leadership style itself may also depend on whom that style is being applied to. Recent work in person-environment fit research (Hannah, Bluhm, & Avolio, 2024) suggests that the congruence between leadership styles, rather than the style alone, may be an underexamined factor shaping outcomes. This raises the question of whether the leadership-satisfaction link observed in the existing literature would look different if employee preferences were considered. The literature on Generation Z in the workplace provides one reason to think it might.

2.2 Generation Z in the workplace

Research on Generation Z identified this cohort as holding workplace expectations that differ from previous generations. The literature suggests that Generation Z prioritise rapid career development, meaningful work, supportive leadership, continuous feedback, recognition, work-life balance and mentorship over rigid hierarchies, while traditional priorities such as job security and hierarchical advancement appear less central. Furthermore, Gen Z showcases high turnover intentions when these priorities are unmet (Seemiller & Grace, 2017; Maříková et al., 2025; Mabaso, 2025; Mac & Tran, 2026).

Research examining what shapes job satisfaction in this cohort points to several organisational and psychosocial conditions, including work-life balance, development opportunities, organisational climate and psychological well-being (Ie et al., 2026; Kowalczyk-Kroenke, 2026; Mabaso, 2025). At the same time, studies indicate that younger employees place particular emphasis on leadership that provides guidance, recognition and opportunities for growth, and if expectations in the area are unmet it may contribute to disengagement, lower job satisfaction and higher turnover intentions. Furthermore, misalignment between personal values and organisational culture can affect job satisfaction (Saraiva & Nogueiro, 2025).

Research has further identified several factors contributing positively to job satisfaction among Generation Z employees: learning and development, passion and enjoyment, personal achievements, financial security, family-related motives as well as the perceived impact of one's work on society and others (Talamayan et al., 2025). Taken together, these studies position leadership not as one factor among many, but as a particularly important one for Generation Z's workplace outcomes.

The Swedish context adds a further layer to this picture. A Swedish study of young adults in the retail sector describes desirable leadership as a combination of participation, respect, competence, clear authority and objective feedback, suggesting that younger workers may hold distinct expectations regarding how leadership should be exercised. The wider literature has argued that younger employees may differ from older colleagues in their preference for leadership and may require different forms of leadership compared to previous generations (Svensson et al., 2025). Earlier Swedish research has identified age-related differences in job satisfaction more broadly (Van Vianen et al., 2022; Åkerstrom et al., 2023) but has not directly linked these differences to leadership style or to the gap between preferred and experienced leadership.

2.3 Knowledge gap and bridge to theoretical framework

Leadership may be particularly relevant for younger employees. Research on Generation Z suggests that career development opportunities, organisational culture and unmet work expectations are important for job satisfaction and retention in this cohort (Mabaso, 2025; Saraiva & Nogueiro, 2025; Mac & Tran, 2026). Moreover, studies have shown younger employees increasingly expect leadership approaches that emphasise recognition,

communication and opportunities for development, rather than traditional hierarchical leadership structures. Prior work also indicates that ineffective leadership is a key driver of worker disengagement and dissatisfaction (Saraiva & Nogueiro, 2025).

Reviewing the literature together reveals a specific gap. The leadership-style literature has established that style predicts job satisfaction but has largely treated the relationship as a property of the style itself rather than of its alignment with employees' preferences. The Generation Z literature has established cohort-specific leadership preferences and negative effects in their absence but has not directly examined whether the match between preferred and experienced leadership predicts job satisfaction. The two strands are complementary but have remained separate.

This gap is particularly visible in the Swedish context, where leadership preferences among young adults in the relevant age range have been documented (Svensson et al., 2025) and where age-related variation in job satisfaction is known (Van Vianen et al., 2022; Åkerstrom et al., 2023), yet no study to date has directly linked these strands by examining the alignment between preferred and experienced leadership styles as a predictor of job satisfaction. Closing this gap requires a theoretical framework capable of conceptualising person-environment alignment as a distinct construct, rather than as a by-product of either the person or the environment alone. The next section develops that framework by drawing on person-environment fit theory and the Full Range Leadership Model.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 P-E fit theory

We employ the lens of person-environment fit to study the effect of congruence between preferred and experienced leadership and its effect on job satisfaction. In summary, the P-E fit theory and research around it explains that the relationship between an individual and their work environment influences individual thoughts, behaviours and work outcomes. In other words, attitudes, behaviours and other individual-level outcomes result not only from the person or the environment separately but from the interplay between them (Caplan, 1987; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Ahmad et al., 2025). Edwards (1996) argues that fit theory is based on the principle that individual-level outcomes and strains are shaped by the degree of congruence between personal and environmental characteristics; this perspective tells us that negative outcomes such as damage to job satisfaction emerge when there is a mismatch between what the individual values or prefers and what the work environment provides. Caplan (1987) also conceptualises fit and the P-E theory in a similar manner. Caplan further emphasises that person and environment should be assessed along comparable dimensions, allowing direct comparison between individual preferences and environmental characteristics.

P-E fit has become one of the most influential perspectives in organisational research. Schneider (2001) described person-environment fit as among the most influential conceptual frameworks in organisational research, a position supported by recent research (Ahmad et al., 2025; Hannah et al., 2024).

The relevance of P-E fit theory for the present study is reinforced by Van Vianen's (2018) review of the field. Drawing on Kristof-Brown et al. (2005), she notes that person-supervisor fit "primarily impacts employees' attitudes toward the proximal work context" and is most strongly related to supervisor and job satisfaction outcomes, which directly mirrors the relationship examined in this study. Van Vianen (2018) further distinguishes between perceived and calculated fit measures and observes that perceived fit, although it tends to be the strongest predictor of employee attitudes, has been criticised for producing correlations with job attitudes so high that researchers have questioned the

distinctiveness of the concepts. This methodological tension, perceived fit being the most proximate measure of subjective outcomes while also being the most vulnerable to common-source inflation, provides part of the justification for testing leadership fit in this study through both a perceived measure and a more indirect subjective measure (see Section 5).

This positions P-E fit as a useful lens for our research on whether the congruence between individually preferred leadership style and environmentally experienced leadership style affects job satisfaction. P-E theory offers a clear explanation: if employees prefer a certain way of being led but experience another type of leadership, the mismatch may reduce satisfaction, and vice versa.

Research in P-E fit theory has classified the theory and domains of fit into four pillars: person-job, person-organisation, person-group and person-supervisor fit. For this study, the more relevant pillars are person-job fit and person-supervisor fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Person-job fit is an area defined as the relationship between a person and the job, with two basic conceptualisations. The first is the demands-abilities fit, and the second, more important for this study, is the form of fit occurring when employees' needs or preferences are met by the jobs that they perform, called needs-supplies fit. This type of fit has been the emphasis of various satisfaction research (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Person-supervisor fit exists in one-to-one relationships between individuals and others in their work environment; the most researched area is between supervisors and subordinates. Kristof-Brown et al. further show that these forms of fit are related to individual outcomes such as job satisfaction.

In this study, we test a special case of person-supervisor fit, which we define as the level of congruence between the leadership style preferred by an employee and the leadership style experienced at work via the supervisor. Based on P-E fit theory and the above-mentioned sources, we propose that individual job satisfaction among Generation Z employees is influenced by the level of fit between leadership styles of P and E. In our special case, and in alignment with the theory, P is represented by the employee, and E is represented by the supervisor.

Recent leadership research has also begun to examine fit specifically in relation to leadership styles. Hannah, Bluhm and Avolio (2024) examined hierarchical leader-leader

fit, referring to the congruence between leadership styles of leaders operating at different organisational levels. Drawing on P-E theory, they conceptualise their own special case of fit logic and show that alignment between leadership styles is associated with positive outcomes such as higher performance and lower deviance behaviour among junior and senior leaders in military settings. Their findings highlight the importance of leadership style congruence as a contextual factor shaping workplace outcomes.

Building on this logic, the present study examines whether a similar form of alignment, between employees' preferred leadership style and the leadership style they experience, may influence job satisfaction. By doing so, it explores whether misalignments between leadership preferences and experienced leadership may be one potential explanation for variations in job satisfaction among early-career employees. This study extends P-E fit research to Generation Z in Sweden, a growing workforce segment underrepresented in fit literature.

3.2 Full Range Leadership Model

One of the widely used frameworks for analysing leadership behaviour is the Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM), originally developed by Bass (1985). The model categorises leadership behaviour into three main leadership styles: transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership (Barasa & Kariuki, 2025).

Transformational leadership refers to a leadership style in which leaders seek to inspire and motivate employees by communicating a clear vision and encouraging commitment to organisational goals. Leaders using this style typically seek to stimulate employees intellectually and support their individual development (Aburumman & Alrweis, 2025).

Transactional leadership, in contrast, is based on an exchange relationship between leaders and employees. Leaders set expectations for performance and reinforce these expectations through rewards. Previous research also shows that transactional leadership can contribute to employee satisfaction and support performance outcomes (Aburumman & Alrweis, 2025).

A third leadership style in the model is laissez-faire leadership. This style is generally described as a passive form of leadership in which leaders tend to avoid taking responsibility for decision-making and provide minimal supervision and limited leader

involvement. Research also associates laissez-faire leadership with poor decision-making, low motivation and reduced performance (Barasa & Kariuki, 2025).

The Full Range Leadership Model is relevant to our study as it offers a structured framework for categorising different leadership styles. Since this study examines preferred leadership styles, the model provides a useful basis for categorising and analysing leadership preferences. It is also relevant because previous research links leadership styles within the model to employee outcomes such as job satisfaction, although the effects may differ between leadership styles (Aburumman & Alrweis, 2025; Barasa & Kariuki, 2025).

3.3 Limitations of the frameworks

Despite their widespread use in prior research, the theoretical frameworks applied in this study are not without limitations. While person-environment fit theory provides a useful lens for understanding how alignment between employees and their work environment relates to job attitudes, the theory has also been criticised for several limitations. Van Vianen (2018) notes that fit theory has insufficiently addressed how individuals adapt to misfits over time, and that the boundary conditions under which fit and misfit affect outcomes remain underspecified. This limits the theory's ability to fully capture dynamic work experiences, such as the evolving expectations of Generation Z workers. In addition, Keane et al. (2024) highlight that P-E fit research still shows gaps in how fit is conceptualised and how it translates into employee outcomes, suggesting that the theory does not always explain the underlying processes clearly. Taken together, these limitations indicate that P-E fit is a valuable but incomplete framework for understanding leadership fit and job satisfaction, but it offers one valuable lens.

When it comes to the Full Range Leadership Model, one limitation is the inclusion of laissez-faire leadership within the model. Ntalakos et al. (2026) describe this dimension as the absence of leadership, where leaders abdicate leadership responsibilities. This raises the issue of whether it should be understood as a leadership style or rather as a form of non-leadership. At the same time, the Full Range Leadership Model may overlap with other leadership frameworks. Lee et al. (2019) show, for example, that ethical leadership predicts follower outcomes beyond the Full Range Leadership Model, suggesting that the model may not capture all relevant leadership behaviours. Taken together, these

limitations suggest that while the model may not capture every leadership behaviour relevant to job satisfaction, it still provides a useful and well-established framework for examining broad leadership patterns.

4. Hypotheses

Based on P-E fit theory, individual outcomes such as job satisfaction emerge from the alignment between the person and their work environment, rather than from either side in isolation (Caplan, 1987; Edwards, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). When the characteristics of the environment match the needs and preferences of the individual, the result is fit; when they diverge, the result is misfit, which has been linked to strain and reduced satisfaction (Edwards, 1996; Van Vianen, 2018). The needs-supplies form of person-job fit and the person-supervisor form of fit are particularly relevant here, since both concern the degree to which the leadership an employee receives matches what that employee needs or prefers from a supervisor (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

In this study, preferred leadership style represents the individual side of the fit equation, and experienced leadership style represents the environmental side. The two are made commensurate, in line with Caplan's (1987) requirement that person and environment be assessed along comparable dimensions, by classifying both within the same Full Range Leadership Model categories (Barasa & Kariuki, 2025). This parallels the logic used by Hannah, Bluhm and Avolio (2024), who applied P-E fit reasoning to leadership style congruence in a hierarchical leader-leader context and found that alignment between leadership styles was associated with more favourable outcomes such as higher performance and lower deviance behaviour. The present study extends this congruence logic from leader-leader fit to employee-supervisor fit and applies it to job satisfaction as the outcome.

Two additional considerations support a positive relationship between leadership fit and job satisfaction in this specific population. First, Generation Z employees have been shown to hold relatively distinct expectations of leadership, emphasising recognition, communication, and opportunities for development (Seemiller & Grace, 2017; Maříková et al., 2025; Svensson et al., 2025). When such expectations are unmet, prior research has linked the gap to disengagement and lower satisfaction (Saraiva & Nogueiro, 2025). Second, leadership style has consistently been shown to predict job satisfaction across organisational contexts (Alonderienė & Majauskaitė, 2016; Aburumman & Alrweis,

2025; Barasa & Kariuki, 2025). Combining these two strands, the degree to which experienced leadership matches preferred leadership should be expected to track job satisfaction in this population, beyond what is explained by leadership style alone.

Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) further distinguish between two ways of operationalising fit, which lead to two separate hypotheses in this study. Perceived fit, in which respondents directly assess the match between themselves and their environment, captures the subjective sense of fit and is theoretically well aligned with subjective attitudinal outcomes such as job satisfaction (Caplan, 1987; Bohndick et al., 2022). Subjective fit, in which the person and the environment are rated separately and then compared, provides a more indirect operationalisation that is less vulnerable to common-source inflation but also less closely tied to respondents' own interpretations (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Hannah et al., 2024). Because the two operationalisations capture different facets of the same underlying construct, both are tested:

H1: Leadership fit is positively associated with job satisfaction.

H1a: Higher perceived leadership fit is associated with higher job satisfaction.

H1b: Employees whose preferred and experienced leadership styles align report higher job satisfaction than employees whose preferred and experienced leadership styles do not align.

5. Method

5.1 Research design and approach

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine whether alignment between preferred and experienced leadership styles is associated with job satisfaction among employed Swedish Generation Z workers, born 1997-2012, who have a manager.

The data were collected using a short online questionnaire created in Microsoft Forms. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. A non-probability convenience sampling strategy was used due to the limited time frame of the study. The survey was distributed through accessible channels such as social media, student networks and students' university emails, in line with Andrade's (2021) definition of convenience sampling as sampling from a conveniently accessible source. As the purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between variables rather than draw conclusions at the population level, this sampling strategy was considered suitable for the study's purpose.

5.2 Sample size

The target of the study was to collect approximately 100-150 responses. This target was set in relation to the purpose of the study and the analyses planned, since the study examined associations between variables rather than producing estimates at population level. Previous research suggests that sample size should be justified in relation to the aim of the study, the planned analyses and the type of conclusions the researcher seeks to draw from the data (Lakens, 2022). For comparison, Memon et al. (2020) note that Roscoe's (1975) widely cited guideline treats samples between 30 and 500 as suitable for many behavioural studies, while stressing that such guidelines should not be used as fixed rules. The final sample of 108 respondents falls within this broad range and is also close to a recent Swedish workplace study on job satisfaction, which included 117 respondents (Molin, 2025).

5.3 Measurement of leadership fit

A central part of this study is the measurement of fit. Previous research identifies three main ways to measure fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Hannah et al., 2024). The first is perceived fit, where respondents directly assess the degree of fit between their preferred leadership style and the leadership style they experience from their manager. The second is subjective fit, which is assessed indirectly through the same respondent's separate ratings of the person and the environment, for example by rating both their own preferences and then the characteristics of their leader. The third is objective fit, where the person and the environment are assessed from different sources and then compared.

In line with the study's focus on Swedish Generation Z workers' experience of fit between their preferred leadership style and the leadership style they experience at work, both a perceived fit and a subjective fit approach were used. Perceived fit was measured directly by asking respondents how well their manager's leadership style matched their preferred leadership style. Subjective fit was measured indirectly by comparing respondents' preferred leadership style with the leadership style they reported experiencing in their current manager.

The use of both approaches was considered appropriate for the purpose of this study. Previous research suggests that direct perceived fit measures may be more vulnerable to bias and inflated relationships, since respondents assess both fit and outcome from the same overall perception (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Hannah et al., 2024). At the same time, perceived fit may be particularly relevant when the outcome of interest is job satisfaction, since job satisfaction is itself a subjective attitudinal outcome shaped by how employees interpret their work environment (Caplan, 1987; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Recent empirical research has further supported the use of both measurement approaches by suggesting that direct and indirect fit measures explain variance in different types of outcomes and may assess partly different theoretical constructs (Bohndick et al., 2022). By combining a perceived fit measure with a more indirect subjective fit measure, the study aimed to capture both respondents' own sense of fit and a more indirect comparison between preferred and experienced leadership style.

5.4 Measurement of job satisfaction

Another central part of the study was the measurement of job satisfaction. Overall job satisfaction was measured using a single-item five-point Likert-type question. Since the study aimed to capture respondents' general level of job satisfaction rather than separate dimensions of satisfaction, a single-item measure was considered appropriate. Although the use of a single-item measure can be seen as a limitation, previous research has shown that single-item measures of overall job satisfaction can demonstrate acceptable reliability and validity (Dolbier et al., 2005). Single-item measures may also be acceptable when the aim is to measure overall job satisfaction rather than specific aspects of job satisfaction separately, particularly when a shorter survey is needed (Wanous et al., 1997). In this study, a single-item measure was therefore chosen to keep the survey brief and reduce respondent burden, in line with previous research highlighting the practical value of shorter measures in survey research (Matthews et al., 2022).

5.5 Measurement of leadership style

Leadership style was measured using a simplified categorisation based on the leadership dimensions commonly associated with the Full Range Leadership Model and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Avolio, Bass & Jung, 1999). The purpose was not to assess the full multidimensional structure of the MLQ, but to classify leadership into three broader leadership styles relevant to the fit measure (transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire).

Preferred leadership style was measured by asking respondents to indicate which type of leadership they most prefer in a manager, choosing from three options reflecting transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership. Experienced leadership style was measured by asking respondents to indicate which type of leadership best described their current manager, selecting from the same three leadership options.

Based on these responses, a fit variable was constructed by comparing preferred and experienced leadership style. A match was coded as fit, while a non-match was coded as misfit. In addition, direct fit was measured through a single-item question asking respondents to evaluate how well their manager's leadership style matched their preferred leadership style, using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("not at all") to 5 ("extremely well").

5.6 Questionnaire

The questionnaire included an information and consent section, screening questions, and items measuring preferred leadership style, experienced leadership style, perceived leadership fit, job satisfaction, and the perceived importance of leadership fit for job satisfaction. The full questionnaire is provided in Appendix 1.

5.7 Data analysis

Data were analysed in JASP using descriptive and inferential statistics. First, descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations and medians where appropriate, were calculated to describe the sample in terms of birth year, preferred and experienced leadership styles, and overall job satisfaction.

To examine the relationship between direct perceived leadership fit and job satisfaction, Spearman's rank-order correlation was used. This was because both variables were measured with single-item five-point Likert-type scales and were therefore treated as ordinal variables. Nonparametric approaches are appropriate when Likert-type rating data are treated as ordinal, as they do not assume equal distances between response categories (Harpe, 2015).

To examine whether job satisfaction differed between respondents whose preferred and experienced leadership styles matched and those whose styles did not match, a Mann-Whitney U test was conducted. This test was chosen because the fit variable divided respondents into two independent groups, fit and misfit, while job satisfaction was measured on an ordinal five-point scale. Mann-Whitney U is commonly used for group comparisons with ordinal Likert-type data (Harpe, 2015).

As a robustness check, an independent-samples t-test was also conducted. In addition, two simple linear regression analyses were performed as complementary analyses. The first tested whether perceived fit predicted job satisfaction. The second tested whether indirect fit, coded as 0 = misfit and 1 = fit, predicted job satisfaction. Although the main analyses treated the variables as ordinal, previous research suggests that parametric analyses can be acceptable for five-point rating-scale data when used carefully (Harpe, 2015). The significance level was set at $p < .05$.

5.8 Ethical considerations

Several measures were taken to ensure that the data were collected in an ethically responsible way. The questionnaire included a short information section explaining the purpose of the study. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could choose not to complete the survey. No names, email addresses or other directly identifying information were collected. This was done to protect respondents' anonymity and to encourage honest answers. The data were only used for this thesis and were analysed in aggregated form.

5.9 Methodological limitations

Some limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this study. First, the study used a non-probability convenience sample. Since respondents were recruited through accessible channels rather than random selection, the sample may not fully reflect the wider population of Swedish Generation Z workers (Andrade, 2021). However, the sample was still relevant for the purpose of the study, since all respondents belonged to the target group and the aim was to examine relationships between variables rather than estimate population-level effects.

Second, the cross-sectional design limits the type of conclusions that can be drawn. Since the data were collected at one point in time, the study can examine whether leadership fit is associated with job satisfaction, but it cannot determine whether leadership fit causes higher job satisfaction.

Third, the study relied on self-reported survey data. This was appropriate given that the study focused on respondents' subjective experiences of leadership fit and job satisfaction. However, the findings therefore reflect employees' perceptions rather than objective assessments of managerial behaviour. This limitation is partly addressed by using both perceived and subjective fit measures.

5.10 Use of AI

During the writing process, generative AI tools, including ChatGPT and Claude, were used in a limited supporting role. Their use was restricted to language refinement and during the initial literature review to summarise selected articles that had already been identified, to provide an overview before reading them in greater detail. The tools were

not used to collect data, conduct statistical analyses or determine the study's findings. All theoretical reasoning, interpretation of results and final conclusions were completed independently.

6. Empirical Findings

6.1 Descriptive statistics

A total of 124 responses were collected from Generation Z individuals across SSE, SU, Ekonomikum, and social networks via social media. After excluding respondents who did not consent to participate in the study, were not currently employed in Sweden, did not have a manager/supervisor, or had invalid entries on birth year, the final sample size was reduced to 108.

Table 1 outlines the number of valid answers from respondents regarding year of birth: 108 valid responses, with a mean year of birth of 2001. The oldest respondents in the sample were born in 1997 and the youngest in 2008. All 108 respondents belong to Generation Z according to this study's definition of Generation Z as well as several cited sources.

Table 1. Year of birth.

What year were you born?	
Valid (n)	108
Mean (arithmetic)	2001
Minimum	1997
Maximum	2008

Table 2 shows that respondents are distributed across birth years 1997 to 2008, with the highest proportion born in 2001 (24.1%). The sample primarily represents the middle part of Generation Z as the data are concentrated in the birth years 1999-2003.

Table 2. Frequencies for birth year.

Year	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative %
1997	7	6.5	6.5	6.5
1998	9	8.3	8.3	14.8
1999	11	10.2	10.2	25.0
2000	16	14.8	14.8	39.8
2001	26	24.1	24.1	63.9
2002	13	12.0	12.0	75.9
2003	11	10.2	10.2	86.1
2004	7	6.5	6.5	92.6
2005	5	4.6	4.6	97.2
2006	1	0.9	0.9	98.1
2007	1	0.9	0.9	99.1
2008	1	0.9	0.9	100.0
Total	108	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 shows that only respondents who consented to participation, reported having a manager/supervisor, and were currently employed in Sweden were included in the analysis.

Table 3. Inclusion criteria responses.

Question	Respondents ("Yes")
Consent to participate	108
Currently employed in Sweden (paid work)	108
Has a manager or supervisor at workplace	108

Table 4 presents the respondents' preferred leadership style. Transformational leadership is preferred by the majority (60.2%, n = 65), followed by transactional leadership (22.2%, n = 24); the least preferred leadership style was laissez-faire leadership (17.6%, n = 19). This shows that the most preferred leadership style among the respondents was transformational leadership.

Table 4. Frequencies for preferred leadership styles.

Leadership style	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative %
Transactional	24	22.2	22.2	22.2
Laissez-faire	19	17.6	17.6	39.8
Transformational	65	60.2	60.2	100.0
Total	108	100.0		

Table 5 presents the respondents' experienced leadership style at work. Transformational leadership is experienced by the largest share (39.8%, n = 43), followed by laissez-faire leadership (33.3%, n = 36); the least experienced style was transactional leadership (26.9%, n = 29).

Table 5. Frequencies for experienced leadership styles.

Leadership style	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative %
Laissez-faire	36	33.3	33.3	33.3
Transactional	29	26.9	26.9	60.2
Transformational	43	39.8	39.8	100.0
Total	108	100.0		

Tables 6 and 7 present respondents' perceived fit between their preferred leadership style and the leadership style they experience at work. The mean perceived fit was 3.19 (SD = 1.05), with a median of 3.00, indicating that the respondents on average perceived the fit as moderate. The most frequently selected response category was "Very well" (36.1%), followed by "Moderately" (32.4%). Overall, respondents perceived the fit between their preferred and experienced leadership style as moderate to relatively high.

Table 6. Respondents' perceived fit between their preferred leadership and experienced leadership

	Perceived fit
Median	3.000
Mean (arithmetic)	3.194
Std. Deviation	1.045

Table 7. Frequencies for respondents' perceived fit between their preferred leadership and experienced leadership

Perceived fit	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative %
1 - Not at all	8	7.4	7.4	7.4
2 - Slightly	18	16.7	16.7	24.1
3 - Moderately	35	32.4	32.4	56.5
4 - Very well	39	36.1	36.1	92.6
5 - Extremely well	8	7.4	7.4	100.0
Total	108	100.0		

Table 8 presents the self-assessed job satisfaction via the single-item Likert scale question. The respondents reported a mean job satisfaction of 3.67 (SD = 1.06). The scores ranged from 1 to 5, indicating that the full response scale was utilised by the respondents. Overall, the sample was “somewhat satisfied” according to the mean.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics for job satisfaction.

	Job satisfaction
Mean (arithmetic)	3.676
Std. Deviation	1.057
Minimum	1.000
Maximum	5.000

Table 9 presents the frequency distribution of respondents: the largest group (44.4%) was “somewhat satisfied”, followed by 21.3% being “very satisfied”. 15.7 % of the sample rated their job satisfaction in the negative part of the response scale, but overall the sample as a whole has a relatively high job satisfaction.

Table 9. Frequencies for job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative %
1 - Very dissatisfied	4	3.7	3.7	3.7
2 - Somewhat dissatisfied	13	12.0	12.0	15.7
3 - Neither sat. nor dissat.	20	18.5	18.5	34.3
4 - Somewhat satisfied	48	44.4	44.4	78.7
5 - Very satisfied	23	21.3	21.3	100.0
Total	108	100.0		

Tables 10 and 11 present the respondents' perceived relationship between leadership fit and job satisfaction. The mean score of 3.52 (SD = 0.79) suggests that respondents generally perceived the relationship between leadership fit and job satisfaction as moderate to a relatively large extent. The most frequent response category was 4 "To a large extent", followed by 3 "To a moderate extent". Categories 4 and 5 together make up 54.6 % of all respondents' answers.

Table 10. Descriptive statistics for perceived relationship between leadership fit and job satisfaction.

	Score
Mean (arithmetic)	3.519
Std. Deviation	0.791
Minimum	1.000
Maximum	5.000

Table 11. Frequencies for respondents perceived relationship between leadership fit and job satisfaction.

Perceived relationship	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative %
1 - Not at all	1	0.9	0.9	0.9
2 - To a small extent	9	8.3	8.3	9.3
3 - To a moderate extent	39	36.1	36.1	45.4
4 - To a large extent	51	47.2	47.2	92.6
5 - To a very large extent	8	7.4	7.4	100.0
Total	108	100.0		

7. Analysis

The analysis is structured around the two operationalisations of fit identified by Kristof-Brown et al. (2005): direct perceived fit, addressed in H1a, and subjective fit, addressed in H1b. The two are then read together to assess what the results say about leadership as a predictor of job satisfaction among Generation Z employees in Sweden, and how the findings relate to previous research on leadership and Generation Z.

7.1 Perceived leadership fit and job satisfaction (Direct fit)

The Spearman rank-order correlation between perceived fit and job satisfaction was statistically significant and moderate in size ($r_s = .548$, $p < .001$, $n = 108$). The simple linear regression confirmed this pattern: perceived fit was a significant positive predictor of job satisfaction, $B = 0.597$, $SE = 0.079$, $\beta = .590$, $t = 7.527$, $p < .001$, and explained 34.8% of the variance in job satisfaction ($R^2 = .348$). Each one-point increase in perceived leadership fit was associated with a 0.597-point increase in self-reported job satisfaction. H1a is therefore supported (for full linear regression model, see Appendix 3).

The size of the effect is consistent with what P-E fit theory would predict for a perceived measure of fit paired with a subjective attitudinal outcome. Caplan (1987) argues that attitudes such as job satisfaction are shaped by how individuals interpret the alignment between themselves and their environment, and Bohndick et al. (2022) note that direct perceived fit measures often produce stronger relationships with subjective outcomes than indirect operationalisations, because both constructs are routed through the same interpretive lens. This conceptual proximity is also a known limitation: Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) and Hannah et al. (2024) caution that perceived fit measures can inflate relationships with attitudinal outcomes through common-source bias, since respondents assess both fit and outcome from a single overall perception. The 34.8% of variance explained is therefore best read as an upper bound on the strength of the relationship rather than a clean causal estimate. This is the reason H1b was tested separately, using a more indirect operationalisation that does not share this vulnerability.

H1a: Higher perceived leadership fit is associated with higher job satisfaction.

Table A. Spearman's correlations between perceived fit and job satisfaction.

Variable 1	Variable 2	n	Spearman's rho	p
Perceived fit	Job satisfaction	108	0.548	< .001

7.2 Subjective leadership fit and job satisfaction

Subjective fit was constructed indirectly by splitting the sample into two groups. Group 1 consisted of respondents with a match between preferred and experienced leadership style, whereas Group 2 consisted of respondents with a mismatch. This allowed us to test whether job satisfaction differs between the two groups due to alignment/misalignment of leadership and to test hypothesis H1b.

H1b: Employees whose preferred and experienced leadership styles align report higher job satisfaction than employees whose preferred and experienced leadership styles do not align.

A statistically significant difference in job satisfaction emerged between the groups. The Mann-Whitney U test indicated that respondents in the fit group reported higher job satisfaction ($M = 4.02$, $n = 44$, mean rank = 63.11) than respondents in the misfit group ($M = 3.44$, $n = 64$, mean rank = 48.58), $U = 1029$, $p = .012$, with a rank-biserial correlation of 0.269 indicating a small to moderate effect. For robustness, a parallel independent-samples t-test was conducted, producing a comparable result ($t = -2.924$, $df = 106$, $p = .004$, Cohen's $d = -0.573$). The linear regression with subjective fit as a dummy predictor was also significant, $F(1, 106) = 8.55$, $p = .004$, explaining 7.5% of the variance in job satisfaction ($R^2 = .075$). Predicted mean job satisfaction was 3.44 in the misfit group and 4.02 in the fit group. H1b is therefore supported (for full t-test see Appendix 2; for full regression model see Appendix 4).

Table B. Mann-Whitney U test for job satisfaction by fit group.

	U	p	Rank-biserial r	SE rank-biserial
Job satisfaction	1029	.012	0.269	0.113

Note. Effect size is given by the rank-biserial correlation.

Table C. Group descriptives - job satisfaction by fit group.

Group	N	Mean	SD	SE	Coefficient of variation	Mean Rank	Sum Rank
0 (Misfit)	64	3.438	1.153	0.144	0.335	48.58	3109
1 (Fit)	44	4.023	0.792	0.119	0.197	63.11	2777

The effect of subjective fit is in the same direction as the effect of perceived fit, but smaller in magnitude. Two reasons help explain the gap. First, the subjective fit variable is dichotomous, fit versus misfit, and therefore cannot capture the degree of variation that the five-point perceived fit scale captures. Second, the subjective measure does not pass through respondents' own judgement of how well their leadership matches their preferences, which removes the common-source inflation that strengthens H1a but also removes signal that may genuinely belong to the construct (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Reading H1a and H1b together, the convergence of two operationalisations in the same direction, despite their different vulnerabilities, strengthens confidence that leadership fit is positively associated with job satisfaction in this sample, beyond what either method would establish on its own.

7.3 The mismatch between preferred and experienced leadership

The descriptive findings (Tables 4 and 5) sharpen the interpretation of the fit results. Transformational leadership was the most preferred style (60.2%), followed at a distance by transactional (22.2%) and laissez-faire leadership (17.6%). The distribution of experienced leadership was strikingly different: only 39.8% of respondents reported a transformational manager, while 33.3% described their manager as laissez-faire and 26.9% as transactional. In other words, the leadership style least preferred by the sample

was the second most experienced, and the most preferred style was reported by a minority. Table D below summarises this asymmetry.

Table D. Distribution of preferred versus experienced leadership style (n = 108).

Leadership style	Preferred %	Experienced %	Gap
Transformational	60.2	39.8	−20.4
Transactional	22.2	26.9	+4.7
Laissez-faire	17.6	33.3	+15.7

Table D matters for the interpretation of H1b. The misfit group is composed of respondents who prefer transformational leadership but do not experience it. The fit literature predicts lower satisfaction wherever preferences and environment diverge, regardless of which specific styles are involved (Edwards, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), and the Mann-Whitney result is consistent with this prediction. At the same time, the descriptive distribution suggests an additional layer worth noting: the dominant form of misfit in this sample is preference for transformational leadership paired with experience of laissez-faire leadership, the most passive end of the Full Range Leadership Model (Barasa & Kariuki, 2025; Ntalakos et al., 2026). This composition of the misfit group connects the findings to two literatures that have, until now, been examined separately. Research on leadership style alone has consistently shown that transformational and transactional leadership are positively associated with job satisfaction, while passive forms of leadership are not (Aburumman & Alrweis, 2025; Barasa & Kariuki, 2025). Research on Generation Z has shown that this cohort places particular value on recognition, communication, and development opportunities, characteristics most closely associated with transformational leadership, and reacts more strongly to their absence than previous generations (Saraiva & Nogueiro, 2025; Maříková et al., 2025; Svensson et al., 2025). The present findings are consistent with both literatures and add a specific reading: the lower job satisfaction observed in the misfit group is unlikely to be a generic fit effect alone, and may be strengthened by the specific combination of preferring an active leadership style and receiving a passive one.

7.4 The two operationalisations together

Table E summarises the theoretical logic and observed effects across the two operationalisations.

Table E. Comparison of perceived and subjective fit operationalisations.

	H1a - Perceived fit	H1b - Subjective fit
Operationalisation	Direct, single rating of match	Comparison of two separate ratings
Theoretical strength	Closely aligned with subjective outcomes	Less vulnerable to common-source inflation
Theoretical weakness	Potential common-source bias	Loses gradient
Observed effect	$r_s = .548$; $R^2 = .348$	$U = 1029$, $p = .012$; $R^2 = .075$

Taken together, the two measures give a stronger basis for interpreting the results than either measure would do on its own. The perceived fit result is large but partly attributable to common-source bias; the subjective fit result is small but less vulnerable to that bias. The fact that both measures point in the same positive direction, with the gap in magnitude explainable by the known properties of each operationalisation, is therefore the most reasonable interpretation of the results: leadership fit is positively associated with job satisfaction among Swedish Generation Z workers in this sample, and the relationship is robust to how fit is measured. This finding extends Hannah, Bluhm and Avolio's (2024) leader-leader fit logic from a vertical, hierarchical context to a horizontal, employee-supervisor context, and it locates the effect in a workforce segment, Generation Z, that has been under-represented in P-E fit research (Van Vianen, 2018; Keane et al., 2024).

8. Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine whether alignment between preferred and experienced leadership style is associated with job satisfaction among Swedish Generation Z workers. Across two operationalisations of fit, the results point in the same direction: respondents who experienced higher fit reported higher job satisfaction. Perceived fit explained a substantial share of the variance in job satisfaction (34.8%), and subjective fit, although smaller in effect, produced a statistically significant difference between fit and misfit groups ($R^2 = .075$). The convergence of two methodologically distinct measures on the same positive relationship is the central empirical finding of this study, and it is consistent with the core proposition of P-E fit theory: that individual outcomes such as job satisfaction emerge from the interplay between the person and the environment rather than from either side alone (Caplan, 1987; Edwards, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

The findings sit alongside, but are distinct from, the existing leadership-style literature. Aburumman and Alrweis (2025) and Barasa and Kariuki (2025) have shown that transformational and transactional leadership are positively associated with job satisfaction. Passive forms of leadership, by contrast, do not show this same positive association (Barasa & Kariuki, 2025). The present study does not contradict these findings, the descriptive data show transformational leadership to be by far the most preferred style, but it adds a layer that the leadership-style literature on its own does not capture. What the fit results suggest is that the relationship between leadership and satisfaction may not be fully explained by the style itself. The same style can have different consequences depending on whether it matches what the employee wants. For Generation Z respondents in this sample, the misfit group was disproportionately composed of employees who preferred transformational leadership and instead experienced laissez-faire leadership, the most passive end of the Full Range Leadership Model. This pattern is consistent with prior work showing that Generation Z employees place particular weight on recognition, communication, and development opportunities, and respond more strongly than previous cohorts when these are absent (Saraiva & Nogueiro, 2025; Maříková et al., 2025; Svensson et al., 2025).

The results also extend the leadership-fit logic developed by Hannah, Bluhm and Avolio (2024). Their study examined hierarchical leader-leader fit and showed that congruence between leadership styles at different organisational levels predicted favourable outcomes such as higher performance and lower deviance behaviour. The present study applies the same congruence logic but moves it from a leader-leader context to an employee-supervisor context, and uses job satisfaction rather than performance as the outcome. The positive relationship observed here suggests that the leadership-fit logic is not bounded to relationships between leaders, and that it operates among early-career, non-leader employees as well. This is a population that has been largely absent from P-E fit research, where most empirical work has focused on more tenured workforces (Van Vianen, 2018; Keane et al., 2024).

The contribution of this study is therefore twofold. Empirically, it provides evidence that leadership fit, measured in two methodologically distinct ways, is positively associated with job satisfaction in a Swedish Generation Z sample. Conceptually, it positions leadership-style congruence as a mechanism that may help explain a pattern that the broader Generation Z literature has documented but largely treated as a black box: the lower job satisfaction and higher disengagement reported among younger employees (Bazargan et al., 2025; Saraiva & Nogueiro, 2025; Cigna, 2022). The findings suggest that part of the gap may not be a generational attitude problem so much as an alignment problem, a structural mismatch between what younger employees expect from leadership and what they receive. This reframing does not displace the existing explanations rooted in work-life balance, organisational climate, or psychological well-being (Ie et al., 2026; Kowalczyk-Kroenke, 2026; Mabaso, 2025), but adds leadership-fit as a complementary factor that has, to date, been examined separately rather than jointly.

9. Conclusion

9.1 Answering the research question

The research question asked: To what extent is alignment between preferred and experienced leadership styles associated with job satisfaction among Swedish Generation Z workers?

Based on a survey of 108 Swedish Generation Z employees, this study finds that alignment between preferred and experienced leadership style is positively associated with job satisfaction. The relationship holds across both perceived fit and subjective fit. The perceived fit measure produced a moderate-to-large effect ($r_s = .548$; $R^2 = .348$) and the subjective fit measure produced a smaller but statistically significant effect ($R^2 = .075$), with the gap in magnitude consistent with the known methodological properties of each operationalisation (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Hannah et al., 2024). Read together, the two operationalisations support the conclusion that leadership fit is associated with job satisfaction in this population, and the relationship is robust to how fit is measured.

9.2 Study contributions

9.2.1 Research implications

This study contributes to the P-E fit literature by extending leadership-style congruence logic from hierarchical leader-leader contexts (Hannah et al., 2024) to employee-supervisor contexts in an early-career workforce. It also adds a leadership-fit perspective to the Generation Z literature, which has examined leadership and job satisfaction predominantly as separate variables. The findings suggest that the relationship between leadership and satisfaction in this cohort may be more usefully framed as one of alignment than of style alone, and that variation in job satisfaction among Generation Z employees may partly reflect a structural mismatch between leadership preferences and leadership received.

9.2.2 Practical implications

For management practitioners, the findings carry three practical readings. First, the findings suggest that organisations may benefit from paying greater attention to leadership preferences during onboarding and manager-employee interactions. Second, given the descriptive finding that one-third of respondents experienced laissez-faire leadership while only 17.6% preferred it, organisations employing Generation Z workers in Sweden may benefit from examining whether passive leadership patterns are present, and whether they are concentrated in teams with high turnover or low engagement. Third, leadership development programs can be designed with the recognition that the same leadership style may produce different outcomes depending on the preferences of the team being led; matching leader development to the leadership expectations of incoming cohorts is therefore not only a developmental issue for the leader but a fit issue for the team. These implications are framed cautiously, in line with the exploratory and cross-sectional nature of the study.

10. Limitations and Future Research

The findings of this study should be read against several limitations. The sample of 108 respondents is sufficient for the analyses conducted but limits the generalisability of the results, particularly across industries and regions. Convenience sampling through student networks and social media further constrains representativeness, and the sample is concentrated in the middle birth-years of Generation Z (1999-2003), with younger respondents (2006-2008) underrepresented. The cross-sectional design does not allow causal conclusions: the data establish association, not direction. It's also possible that more satisfied employees retrospectively rate their leader's style more favourably, that the causal relationship operates in the opposite direction, or that both job satisfaction and perceived fit are shaped by a third variable not measured here, such as organisational climate or team-level psychological well-being.

The measurement choices also carry trade-offs. Job satisfaction was measured using a single-item scale, which is defensible for capturing overall satisfaction (Dolbier et al., 2005; Matthews et al., 2022) but cannot distinguish between dimensions of satisfaction. Leadership style was measured using a simplified three-category classification based on the broader leadership dimensions associated with the MLQ (Avolio et al., 1999) rather than the full multidimensional instrument, which keeps respondent burden low but reduces the level of detail in the measurement. The perceived fit measure, although theoretically aligned with subjective outcomes, is vulnerable to common-source bias (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Hannah et al., 2024), and the subjective fit measure, although less vulnerable to this bias, is binary and therefore loses gradient. Each of these choices is justifiable in isolation, and the convergence of results across both fit operationalisations partly mitigates these concerns, but the limitations are real and constrain the strength of the conclusions.

Several directions for future research follow. Longitudinal designs would allow the direction of the leadership-fit and job-satisfaction relationship to be tested directly.

Studies using the full MLQ instrument and multi-item job satisfaction scales would allow the relationships observed here to be tested with greater measurement precision and decomposed by leadership-style component. Mixed-methods approaches incorporating qualitative interviews could explore the mechanisms through which misfit translates into lower satisfaction, whether through reduced engagement, weakened identification, or specific unmet expectations. Comparative designs across generational cohorts would also clarify whether the leadership-fit effect observed here is specific to Generation Z or operates similarly across age groups. Finally, extending the design to leadership-fit between Generation Z employees and leaders from other generational cohorts would speak directly to the cross-generational dynamics that the broader Generation Z literature has identified but not yet tested through a fit lens.

11. Final Thoughts

As Generation Z continues to enter the labour market, the question of why this cohort reports lower job satisfaction than previous generations have moved from the margins to the centre of organisational research. This study has approached one slice of that question by examining whether the leadership Generation Z employees actually receive matches the leadership they prefer, and what that match, or its absence, means for how satisfied they are at work. The results are preliminary, but they point in a consistent direction: alignment matters, and it matters in a workforce segment that has, until recently, been studied largely without the lens of fit. The findings here are a small step rather than a definitive one, but they suggest that some of what has been read as a generational shift in attitudes may instead reflect an alignment problem.

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Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

The following items were included in the online questionnaire.

1. Consent.

By selecting “I agree”, you confirm that: you have read and understood the information above, and you voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

1 = I agree to participate in this study

2 = I do not agree to participate in this study

2. What year were you born?

(Open response)

3. Are you currently employed in Sweden?

1 = Yes

2 = No

4. Do you currently have a manager or supervisor at your workplace?

1 = Yes

2 = No

5. Which type of leadership do you most prefer in a manager?

1 = A manager who motivates employees, encourages new ideas, and supports their development (transformational leadership)

2 = A manager who focuses on setting clear expectations and rewarding good performance (transactional leadership)

3 = A manager who mainly allows employees to organise and manage their own work independently (laissez-faire leadership)

6. How would you describe the leadership style of your current manager?

1 = My manager mainly motivates employees, encourages new ideas, and supports employees' development (transformational leadership)

2 = My manager mainly focuses on setting clear expectations and rewards for performance (transactional leadership)

3 = My manager mainly allows employees to organise and manage their own work independently (laissez-faire leadership)

7. Overall, how well does your manager's leadership style match your preferred leadership style?

1 = Not at all | 2 = Slightly | 3 = Moderately | 4 = Very well | 5 = Extremely well

8. Overall, how satisfied are you with your current job?

1 = Very dissatisfied | 2 = Somewhat dissatisfied | 3 = Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied | 4 = Somewhat satisfied | 5 = Very satisfied

9. To what extent does the match between your preferred leadership style and the leadership style you experience influence your job satisfaction?

1 = Not at all | 2 = To a small extent | 3 = To a moderate extent | 4 = To a large extent | 5 = To a very large extent

Appendix 2: Independent Samples T-Test

Table F. Independent-samples t-test for job satisfaction by fit group.

	t	df	p	Cohen's d	SE Cohen's d
Job satisfaction	-2.924	106	.004	-0.573	0.202

Note. Student's t-test.

Table G. Group descriptives - independent-samples t-test.

	Group	N	Mean	SD	SE	Coefficient of variation
Job satisfaction	0	64	3.438	1.153	0.144	0.335
	1	44	4.023	0.792	0.119	0.197

Appendix 3: Linear Regression Model 1 - Perceived Fit

Table H. Model summary - job satisfaction predicted by perceived fit.

Model	R	R²	Adj. R²	RMSE	R² Change	df1	df2	p
M ₀	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.057	0.000	0	107	
M ₁	0.590	0.348	0.342	0.858	0.348	1	106	< .001

Note. M₁ includes Perceived fit.

Table I. ANOVA - M₁.

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	41.68	1	41.68	56.65	< .001
Residual	77.98	106	0.736		
Total	119.7	107			

Note. M₁ includes Perceived fit.

Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Table J. Coefficients.

Model		Unstandardized	SE	Standardized	t	p	95% CI lower	95% CI upper
M ₀	(Intercept)	3.676	0.102		36.12	< .001	3.474	3.878
M ₁	(Intercept)	1.769	0.266		6.637	< .001	1.240	2.297
	Perceived fit	0.597	0.079	0.590	7.527	< .001	0.440	0.754

Table K. Descriptives.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	SE
Job satisfaction	108	3.676	1.057	0.102
Perceived fit	108	3.194	1.045	0.101

Appendix 4: Linear Regression Model 2 - Subjective Fit

Table L. Model summary - job satisfaction predicted by subjective fit.

Model	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	RMSE	R ² Change	df1	df2	p
M ₀	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.057	0.000	0	107	
M ₁	0.273	0.075	0.066	1.022	0.075	1	106	.004

Note. M₁ includes Subjective fit (0 = misfit, 1 = fit).

Table M. ANOVA - M₁.

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	8.930	1	8.930	8.549	.004
Residual	110.7	106	1.045		
Total	119.7	107			

Note. M₁ includes Subjective fit (0 = misfit, 1 = fit).

Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Table N. Coefficients - M_1 .

Model		Unstandardized	SE	Standardized	t	p	95% CI lower	95% CI upper
M_0	(Intercept)	3.676	0.102		36.12	< .001	3.474	3.878
M_1	(Intercept)	3.437	0.128		26.91	< .001	3.184	3.691
	Subjective fit	0.585	0.200	0.273	2.924	.004	0.188	0.982

Table O. Descriptives.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	SE
Job satisfaction	108	3.676	1.057	0.102
Subjective fit	108	0.407	0.494	0.048