Innovations

Contemporary Leadership and the New Workforce: A Quantitative Analysis of Job Satisfaction and Motivation among Gen Z Employees in Sri Lanka's IT Industry

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Abstract: *The rapid growth of Sri Lanka's Information Technology (IT) industry has created a diverse and dynamic workforce increasingly driven by Generation Z employees, whose expectations and values differ significantly from previous generations. Understanding how leadership styles influence their workplace attitudes is therefore essential for sustaining motivation and satisfaction in this fast-evolving sector. This study examines the impact of four contemporary leadership styles Servant, Agile, Authentic, and Collaborative on job satisfaction and motivation among Gen Z professionals in Sri Lanka's IT industry. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from 276 respondents through an online survey and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including regression analysis. The results indicate that all four leadership styles significantly affect both job satisfaction and motivation, with Servant Leadership emerging as the strongest predictor of job satisfaction and Authentic Leadership exerting the greatest influence on motivation. Although Collaborative Leadership showed a weaker relationship with job satisfaction, it still demonstrated a positive effect on motivation. The study also found that Gen Z employees highly value leadership traits such as flexibility, adaptability, decision-making responsibility, self-awareness, and problem-solving. These findings highlight the importance of cultivating leadership approaches that align with the expectations of the younger workforce, encouraging organizations to promote flexible, ethical, and participative leadership to enhance engagement, performance, and retention within the IT industry.*

Keywords: Generation Z, Leadership Styles, Job Satisfaction, Employee Motivation, Information Technology Industry.

1. Introduction

The twenty-first-century workplace is experiencing significant transformation due to technological advancements, globalization, and evolving workforce demographics, with Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, emerging as a key driver of organizational change (McKinsey & Company, 2022). As digital natives, Gen Z employees bring unique

values, expectations, and working styles, prioritizing purpose-driven work, flexibility, innovation, inclusivity, and continuous feedback over traditional hierarchical structures and financial incentives (McKinsey & Company, 2022). In Sri Lanka's rapidly growing IT sector (SLASSCOM, 2021), which contributes substantially to national GDP and global competitiveness, understanding how leadership styles affect Gen Z's attitudes and performance has become critical. These employees demonstrate strong technological competence and preference for dynamic, collaborative environments, but exhibit lower tolerance for rigid management, limited autonomy, and lack of recognition, posing both opportunities and challenges for leaders (PwC, 2022). Contemporary leadership models such as Servant, Agile, Authentic, and Collaborative Leadership have gained prominence by emphasizing empathy, transparency, adaptability, and shared decision-making qualities closely aligned with Gen Z expectations (McKinsey & Company, 2022). Servant Leadership focuses on empowering employees and fostering personal growth, Agile Leadership promotes flexibility and responsiveness, Authentic Leadership emphasizes ethical integrity and genuine relationships, and Collaborative Leadership encourages inclusivity and teamwork. Despite global recognition of these styles, empirical evidence on their effectiveness within Sri Lanka's IT industry remains limited .

This study aims to address this gap by quantitatively examining how these leadership approaches influence Gen Z employees' job satisfaction and motivation, identifying the traits most valued by this generation, and providing insights for optimizing leadership practices in a digital and multigenerational workplace. By employing structured surveys and statistical analyses, the research seeks to inform managerial strategies that enhance employee engagement, retention, and performance. The findings are expected to contribute to academic literature and practical leadership frameworks, demonstrating that aligning leadership with Gen Z values is essential for cultivating a motivated, innovative, and resilient workforce, thereby supporting organizational sustainability and positioning Sri Lanka's IT sector for long-term success in the competitive global technology landscape.

1.1 Problem statement:

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is rapidly becoming a dominant segment of the global workforce, accounting for an estimated 27% of the labor force by 2025 (World Economic Forum, 2022). In Sri Lanka, this generation is notably shaping the Information Technology (IT) and startup sectors, bringing with them unique workplace values such as flexibility, inclusivity, technological adaptability, and a strong desire for purpose-driven and feedback-oriented environments. However, recent studies highlight growing concerns regarding Gen Z's engagement, motivation, and job satisfaction, with many reporting feelings of disconnection due to traditional leadership approaches that fail to align with their expectations (Deloitte, 2023; SLASSCOM, 2021). As organizations operate within an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environment, traditional hierarchical and transactional leadership styles appear less effective in engaging this new

generation. This situation underscores the need to examine how contemporary, people-centric leadership styles such as Servant, Agile, Authentic, and Collaborative leadership affect Gen Z employees' job satisfaction and motivation within Sri Lanka's IT industry.

1.2 Identified gaps:
The literature review identifies several key gaps in studying leadership styles and their impact on Gen Z employees in Sri Lanka. Existing research predominantly focuses on traditional leadership models, with limited exploration of contemporary styles like authentic, servant, agile, and collaborative leadership. Studies often examine leadership styles in isolation, neglecting their combined effect on job satisfaction and motivation. Methodologically, prior research is mostly qualitative or small-scale, limiting generalizability. Gen Z employees are underrepresented, and their unique needs for empowerment, feedback, and purpose-driven work remain understudied. Most studies are Western-centric, creating cultural and geographical gaps, while conflicting global findings highlight empirical gaps. Additionally, contemporary leadership practices are rarely applied in Sri Lankan organizations, and recent workplace changes due to COVID-19 and economic disruptions indicate a temporal gap. These gaps underscore the need for context-specific empirical research on leadership and Gen Z in Sri Lanka.

1.3 Significance of the study: This study holds both practical and theoretical significance. Practically, it provides Sri Lankan IT organizations with evidence-based insights into how contemporary leadership styles authentic, servant, agile, and collaborative affect Gen Z employees' job satisfaction and motivation, enabling organizations to align leadership practices with generational values, improve talent retention, and design targeted HR interventions such as coaching, feedback systems, and inclusive work environments. Theoretically, the research extends leadership theory by examining lesser-studied models in the context of Gen Z, integrating motivational variables, and applying a generational and cultural lens to the Sri Lankan IT sector. By employing quantitative methods, it produces generalizable findings, fills empirical and contextual gaps in leadership literature, and enhances understanding of how leadership behaviors interact with motivation and cultural factors to influence employee outcomes, providing a foundation for future research and theory development.

1.4 Objectives:
- To identify the most preferred leadership traits among Gen Z employees in Sri Lanka's IT industry
- To examine the relationship between leadership styles and job satisfaction among Gen Z employees in Sri Lanka's IT industry
- To examine the relationship between leadership styles and work motivation among Gen Z employees in Sri Lanka's IT industry.

1.5 Research questions:
- What are the most preferred leadership traits among Gen Z employees in the IT industry in Sri Lanka?
- How do different leadership styles relate to the job satisfaction of Gen Z employees in the IT industry in Sri Lanka?
- How do different leadership styles relate to the work motivation of Gen Z employees in the IT industry in Sri Lanka?

2. Literature Review:

Recent studies indicate that leadership styles significantly affect job satisfaction among Gen Z employees, especially in the IT sector. Transformational leadership, with its focus on inspiration, personal growth, and supportive guidance, aligns closely with Gen Z's expectations, while transactional leadership provides structure and performance-based rewards. Cultural and organizational contexts, particularly in Asian countries, influence the effectiveness of these styles. Overall, adopting motivational, empowering, and ethical leadership approaches is essential to enhance engagement and satisfaction among Gen Z professionals.

2.1 Leadership styles

Leadership styles significantly influence job satisfaction in modern organizations, particularly in dynamic sectors like IT, where Generation Z employees prioritize purpose, collaboration, and personal growth. Agile leadership promotes adaptability, empowerment, and continuous learning, fostering flexibility, reducing burnout, and enhancing employee engagement (Zehetner et al., 2022) . By creating supportive environments and emphasizing trust, open communication, and work–life balance, agile leaders contribute to higher job satisfaction. Servant leadership focuses on empathy, ethical responsibility, and prioritizing employees' personal and professional growth, which strengthens intrinsic motivation, trust, and organizational loyalty (Sigaeva et al., 2022). This style is particularly effective in fast-evolving environments like IT, although it may face challenges such as slower decision-making. Collaborative leadership emphasizes participative decision-making, shared accountability, and open communication, fostering creativity, psychological safety, and team cohesion(Sigaeva et al., 2022). By valuing diverse perspectives and distributing responsibility, collaborative leadership enhances motivation and job satisfaction despite potential challenges like slower decision-making or conflict. Overall, these leadership approaches agile, servant, and collaborative demonstrate strong positive effects on employee satisfaction, engagement, and organizational performance, making them highly relevant for managing Gen Z employees in Sri Lanka's IT industry.

2.2 Gen Z

Generation Z employees, born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, exhibit distinct workplace values shaped by their digital upbringing, emphasizing flexibility, continuous learning, and purpose-driven work. In the IT industry, their job satisfaction is strongly influenced by opportunities for professional growth, work-life balance, and access to advanced technology(Zehetner et al., 2022). Transformational leadership, which fosters empowerment, empathy, and innovation, significantly enhances engagement and satisfaction among Gen Z employees by promoting collaboration, psychological safety, and meaningful contributions (Sigaeva et al., 2022). Organizations that provide inclusive cultures, recognition systems, and mentorship programs further increase motivation and retention, while rigid hierarchies, limited feedback, or lack of technological support can result in disengagement (Sigaeva et al., 2022). Overall, leadership approaches that prioritize adaptability, communication, and employee empowerment are critical for attracting, retaining, and sustaining a committed Gen Z workforce in Sri Lanka's IT sector.

2.3 Work motivation:

Work motivation is a key driver of employee performance and organizational success, particularly for Generation Z in the IT industry. Intrinsic motivation, stemming from personal growth, autonomy, and purpose, has a stronger impact on job satisfaction and performance than extrinsic rewards (Andri & Moko, 2024). Leadership style, especially transformational leadership, significantly enhances motivation by inspiring employees, promoting meaningful work, and aligning personal and organizational goals (Jenei & Machova, 2024). Supportive environments that foster innovation, collaboration, and recognition further strengthen motivation, with leaders who provide development opportunities and purpose-driven roles having the greatest positive impact on satisfaction and commitment (Andri & Moko, 2024).

2.4 Relationship between leadership style and job satisfaction:

The relationship between leadership style and job satisfaction has become a central focus in organizational behavior research, especially in contemporary workplaces influenced by digital transformation and generational diversity. Effective leadership plays a crucial role in shaping employees' emotional engagement, motivation, and satisfaction levels (Northouse, 2018) Studies have shown that transformational leadership, characterized by empathy, inspiration, and empowerment, significantly enhances employees' job satisfaction by aligning individual goals with organizational vision and fostering a sense of belonging. In contrast, transactional leadership, while beneficial in structured settings, may not sustain long-term satisfaction due to its emphasis on performance-based rewards (Sigaeva et al., 2022). Moreover, participative leadership styles that encourage employee involvement in decision-making contribute to higher satisfaction and commitment by promoting a sense of ownership and value. Supportive and empowering leadership environments also reduce stress, increase motivation, and strengthen employee (Zehetner-

Hirtenlehner, 2023). Overall, recent evidence highlights that leadership styles emphasizing empowerment, trust, and recognition are key predictors of job satisfaction, particularly among younger employees in dynamic sectors like IT.

2.5 Impact of leadership styles on work motivation:

Recent research highlights that leadership styles play a critical role in shaping employee work motivation by influencing both intrinsic and extrinsic drivers of performance. Transformational leadership has been shown to enhance intrinsic motivation through inspiration, empowerment, and alignment of personal and organizational goals (Northouse, 2018). Servant and authentic leadership styles also significantly boost motivation by fostering trust, empathy, and ethical relationships that fulfill employees' psychological needs for autonomy and belonging (Northouse, 2018). Similarly, agile leadership has emerged as particularly effective in fast-changing industries, as it promotes adaptability, collaboration, and continuous learning, thereby sustaining motivation in dynamic work environments(Denning, 2018). Collaborative leadership, emphasizing inclusiveness and shared decision-making, enhances motivation by creating a sense of ownership and participation among employees(Zehetner-Hirtenlehner, 2023). In contrast, transactional leadership, which relies heavily on external rewards, offers only short-term motivational effects. Overall, evidence suggests that leadership styles centered on empowerment, trust, and flexibility are the most effective in fostering sustainable work motivation in modern organizations.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design: The study uses a quantitative research design to examine the relationships between leadership styles, work motivation, and job satisfaction. This approach enables numerical measurement of variables, hypothesis testing, and generalization to a larger population. Data is collected using structured Likert-scale surveys, including tools like the MLQ and Work Motivation Scale, ensuring validity and reliability. Statistical analyses such as correlation, regression, ANOVA, and structural equation modeling are applied, with software like SPSS facilitating efficient, objective, and replicable results. Quantitative methods are preferred over qualitative approaches for testing theoretical relationships and producing statistically robust conclusions.

3.2 Research Philosophy:

The study adopts a positivist research philosophy as it aligns with the objective of examining relationships between leadership styles, job satisfaction, and motivation among Gen Z employees in Sri Lanka's IT sector through empirical measurement and statistical analysis. Positivism emphasizes objectivity, quantification, and hypothesis testing, allowing researchers to remain detached and unbiased while relying on observable data. This philosophy supports the use of structured instruments like questionnaires and statistical tools to derive generalizable and replicable findings. It also enables the identification of

patterns and correlations that can contribute to theory development and predictive modeling. Positivism's systematic and scientific approach ensures rigor, validity, and practicality, making it suitable for studies aimed at producing evidence-based insights relevant to real-world organizational contexts. Unlike interpretivism or critical theory, positivism focuses on measurable phenomena rather than subjective experiences or social critique, thus providing a coherent and reliable foundation for this quantitative investigation.

3.3 Research Approach:

The study adopts a deductive research approach as it begins with established theories on leadership styles, job satisfaction, and work motivation, and then tests specific hypotheses within the context of Gen Z employees in Sri Lanka's IT industry. This approach ensures that the research is structured, theory-driven, and objective, allowing for the use of empirical data and statistical analysis to validate or refute existing theoretical relationships. Deductive reasoning follows a top-down process, starting from general theories and moving toward specific observations, ensuring clarity in hypothesis formulation and measurement. It promotes neutrality and efficiency, as researchers focus on predefined variables and systematically test them to achieve generalizable conclusions. Unlike inductive reasoning, which explores new theories through qualitative inquiry, the deductive approach is more appropriate for this study's aim of testing and confirming established models within a defined organizational context.

3.4 Research Method

The study uses a mono-method quantitative approach, relying on structured surveys to examine the relationships between leadership styles, job satisfaction, and work motivation among Gen Z employees in Sri Lanka's IT sector. This approach, grounded in positivist philosophy and deductive reasoning, emphasizes objectivity, measurability, and replicability. It allows for large-scale data collection, statistical analysis, and ensures generalizability and reliability. Compared to mixed or qualitative methods, it offers simplicity, efficiency, and is well-suited for hypothesis testing and empirical validation of theoretical models.

3.5 Research Strategy

The study adopts a survey research strategy to systematically collect standardized, quantifiable data from a large sample of Gen Z employees in the IT industry. This method aligns with positivist philosophy and supports hypothesis testing through statistical analysis. Using pre-validated Likert-scale questionnaires ensures reliable measurement of relationships between leadership styles, job satisfaction, and work motivation. The survey approach is time- and cost-efficient, promotes honest responses through anonymity, and provides a structured, empirical foundation for identifying measurable relationships while maintaining methodological rigor.

3.6 Participants and Sampling

The study focused on Generation Z employees in Sri Lanka's IT sector, born between 1997 and 2005, with at least six months of experience and roles involving autonomous decision-making. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with relevant demographic and professional characteristics, ensuring alignment with the research objectives. Out of an estimated 22,600 Gen Z IT employees(SLASSCOM, 2021)(Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2023), a sample size of 264 was determined using a 95% confidence level and 6% confidence interval, ensuring statistical validity and representativeness.

3.7 Data collection method:

The study used primary data collected through an online questionnaire distributed to Gen Z IT employees via LinkedIn, ensuring firsthand, current, and unbiased information. Secondary data from journals and prior research helped identify key variables. The survey followed principles of simplicity, consistency, logical flow, and visual appeal, with ethical standards upheld through informed consent, anonymity, and data security. Measures like pre- and post-notifications and careful question design minimized low response rates and response biases, ensuring reliable, valid, and ethically sound data collection.

3.8 Data analysis:

The data analysis focuses on exploring relationships between leadership style, job satisfaction, and motivation among Gen Z employees in the IT sector. Pearson correlation will assess the strength and direction of associations, while multiple linear regression will evaluate the combined effects of leadership style and job satisfaction on motivation. Logistic regression may be used if job satisfaction is dichotomous, and ANOVA will compare group means across multiple variables. Although Likert-scale data are ordinal, parametric tests are justified, provided assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and no multicollinearity are met. Data cleaning will remove incomplete or inconsistent responses, and SPSS 27.0 will be used for all statistical analyses, including correlation and probability plots to verify assumptions.

3.9 Validity and Reliability:

The study ensures validity and reliability through multiple measures, including content validity verified by literature review and expert feedback, construct validity confirmed via factor analysis, and criterion-related validity through comparison with external indicators. Reliability is maintained using standardized instruments and procedures, with internal consistency assessed by Cronbach's alpha. Internal validity controls for confounding factors, external validity ensures generalizability, and statistical conclusion validity is supported through appropriate analyses to minimize errors.

Table 1: Operationalization table

Variable	Indicator	Measure
Agile leadership	Adaptability	5-point likert scale
	Flexibility	
	Collaboration	
	Responsiveness to change	
Servant leadership	Responsibility to make important decisions	5-point likert scale
	Reach career goals	
	Organizational goals	
	Freedom	
Collaborative leadership	Time spends with employees	5-point likert scale
	Consider about employees	
	Creates a sense of community	
	Problem solving skills	
Job satisfaction	Continue current job	5-point likert scale
	Welfare system	
	Equal opportunity	
	Flexible working environment	
	Decision making	
	Professional and personal growth	
Motivation	Intrinsic Motivation	5-point likert scale
	Goal Orientation	
	Social Impact	
	External Recognition	
	Self determination	

3.10 Ethical Considerations:

The study adheres to strict ethical standards, ensuring informed consent, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw. Confidentiality and anonymity are maintained, with secure data storage and removal of personal identifiers. Ethical approval was obtained, and researchers disclose conflicts of interest, maintain objectivity, and accurately report findings. Participant welfare is prioritized, minimizing any potential

discomfort, while transparency, honesty, and accountability uphold the study's credibility and ethical integrity.

3.11 Theoretical and conceptual framework

This study uses Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory to examine how leadership styles affect job satisfaction and work motivation among Gen Z employees in Sri Lanka's IT industry. The theory distinguishes intrinsic motivators (e.g., recognition, growth, autonomy) that drive satisfaction from extrinsic hygiene factors (e.g., salary, rules) that prevent dissatisfaction but do not increase engagement. Leadership styles such as servant, collaborative, agile, and authentic leadership align with intrinsic motivators and are likely to enhance employee attitudes, motivation, and engagement, while a focus on extrinsic factors alone may reduce dissatisfaction without boosting morale. Since Gen Z prioritizes meaningful work, personal growth, and flexibility, Herzberg's framework provides a relevant lens for evaluating effective leadership in this sector.

3.12 Conceptualization and hypotheses

This study develops a conceptual framework in figure 1 to examine how different leadership styles Agile, Servant, Collaborative, and Authentic affect job satisfaction and work motivation among Gen Z employees in Sri Lanka's IT industry. Grounded in Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory(1959), it considers leadership as a key factor influencing intrinsic motivators such as recognition, autonomy, personal growth, and meaningful work, which are highly valued by Gen Z. Eight hypotheses (H1–H8) were formulated to test the relationships between each leadership style and both job satisfaction and motivation, with null hypotheses asserting no significant effect and alternative hypotheses proposing a meaningful positive impact. This framework enables systematic assessment of how leadership practices shape employee engagement, satisfaction, and motivation in a generational context.
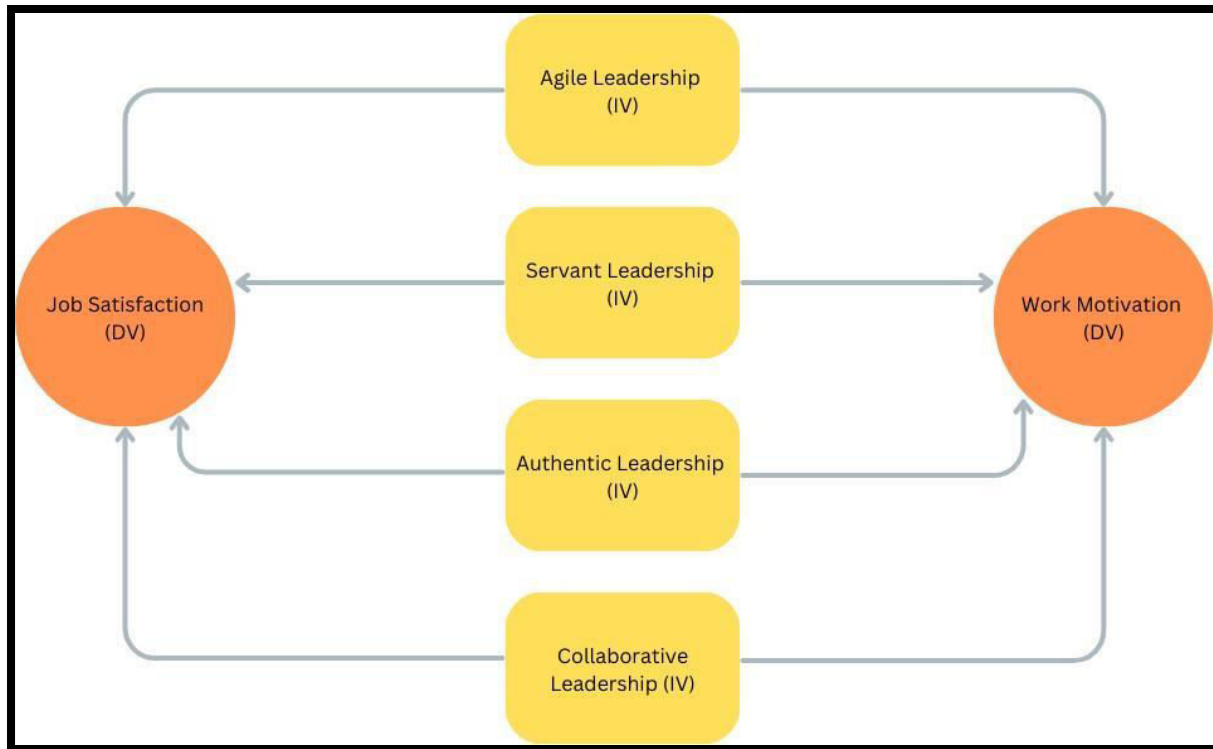
Figure 1: Conceptual framework

4. Data Analysis and presentation: This chapter presents an analysis of data collected to examine the relationship between leadership styles, job satisfaction, and motivation among Gen Z employees in Sri Lanka's IT sector. Descriptive statistics summarize respondent demographics and perceptions of leadership styles, highlighting key trends and preferred traits. Inferential analyses, including regression, assess the strength and significance of relationships between variables. The study used a validated and reliable questionnaire covering demographics, leadership styles, job satisfaction, and motivation, yielding 276 valid responses. Reliability was confirmed with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.80, and validity was ensured through expert review and adaptation from previous studies. Overall, the instrument provided a robust foundation for accurate statistical analysis and meaningful interpretation of findings.

4.1 Descriptive statistics:

The descriptive statistics in figure 2 provide a comprehensive overview of Generation Z employees in Sri Lanka's IT industry. Age distribution (Figure 2a) shows a balanced representation among Young Gen Z (37.7%), Older Gen Z (34.1%), and Youngest Gen Z (28.3%). Educational qualifications (Figure 2b) indicate most respondents are graduates (53.3%), followed by undergraduates (33%) and postgraduates (13.8%). Gender distribution (Figure 2c) is perfectly balanced (138 males and 138 females). Professional experience (Figure 2d) reveals that 50.4% have 3–6 years, 30.8% have 0.5–3 years, and 18.8% have over six years. Cross-tabulations highlight Age × Gender (Figure 2e) with

females slightly higher in Older Gen Z, Educational Qualification × Gender (Figure 2f) with more females among undergraduates, Work Experience × Gender (Figure 2g) showing females at entry and senior levels, Work Experience × Education (Figure 2h) indicating alignment between higher education and experience, Age × Education (Figure 2i) reflecting older Gen Z with higher degrees, and Age × Work Experience (Figure j) confirming experience increases with age. These findings collectively establish a balanced and diverse demographic and professional profile for further analyses on leadership, job satisfaction, and motivation.
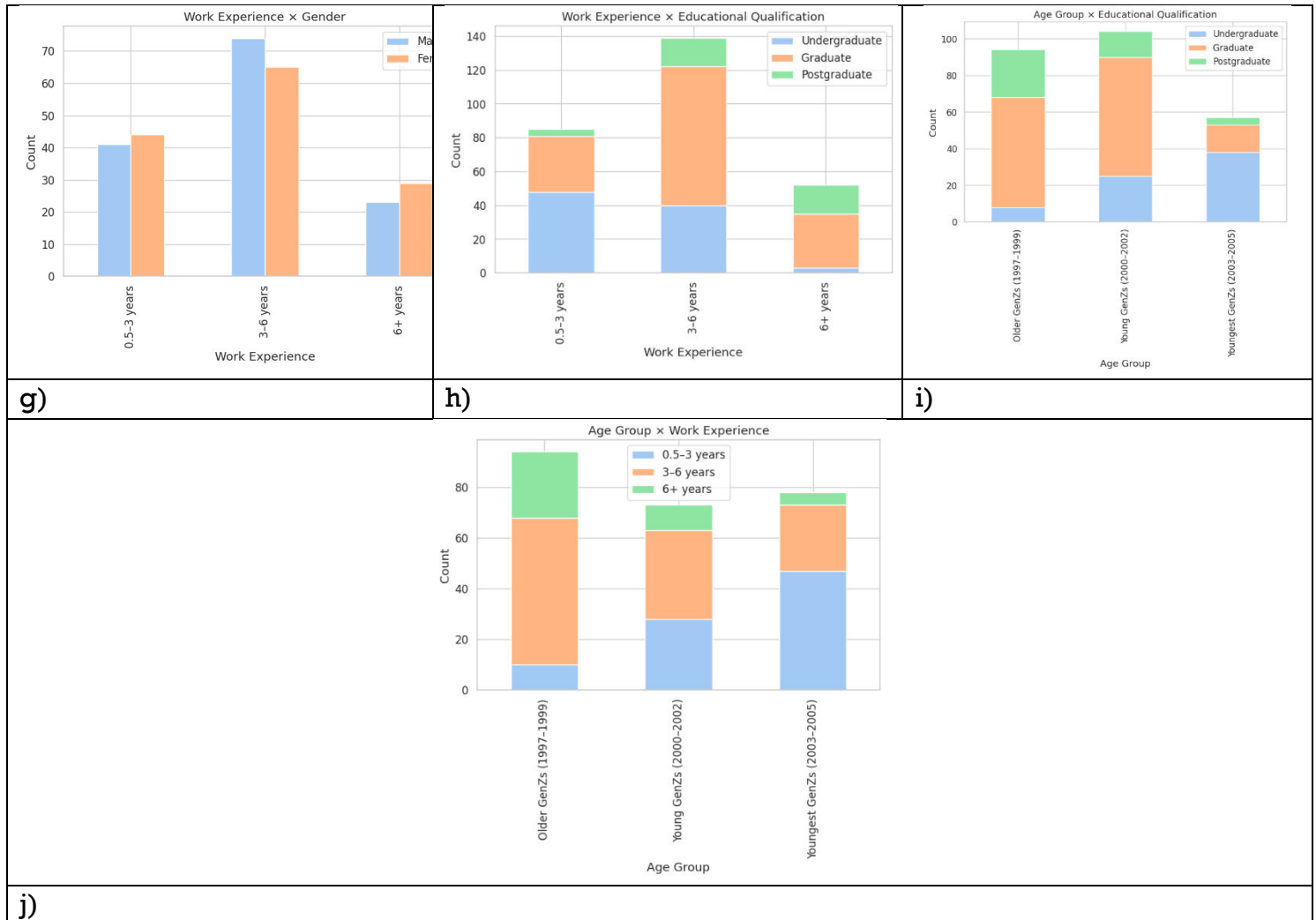

a)

b)

c)

d)

e)

f)

g)

h)

i)

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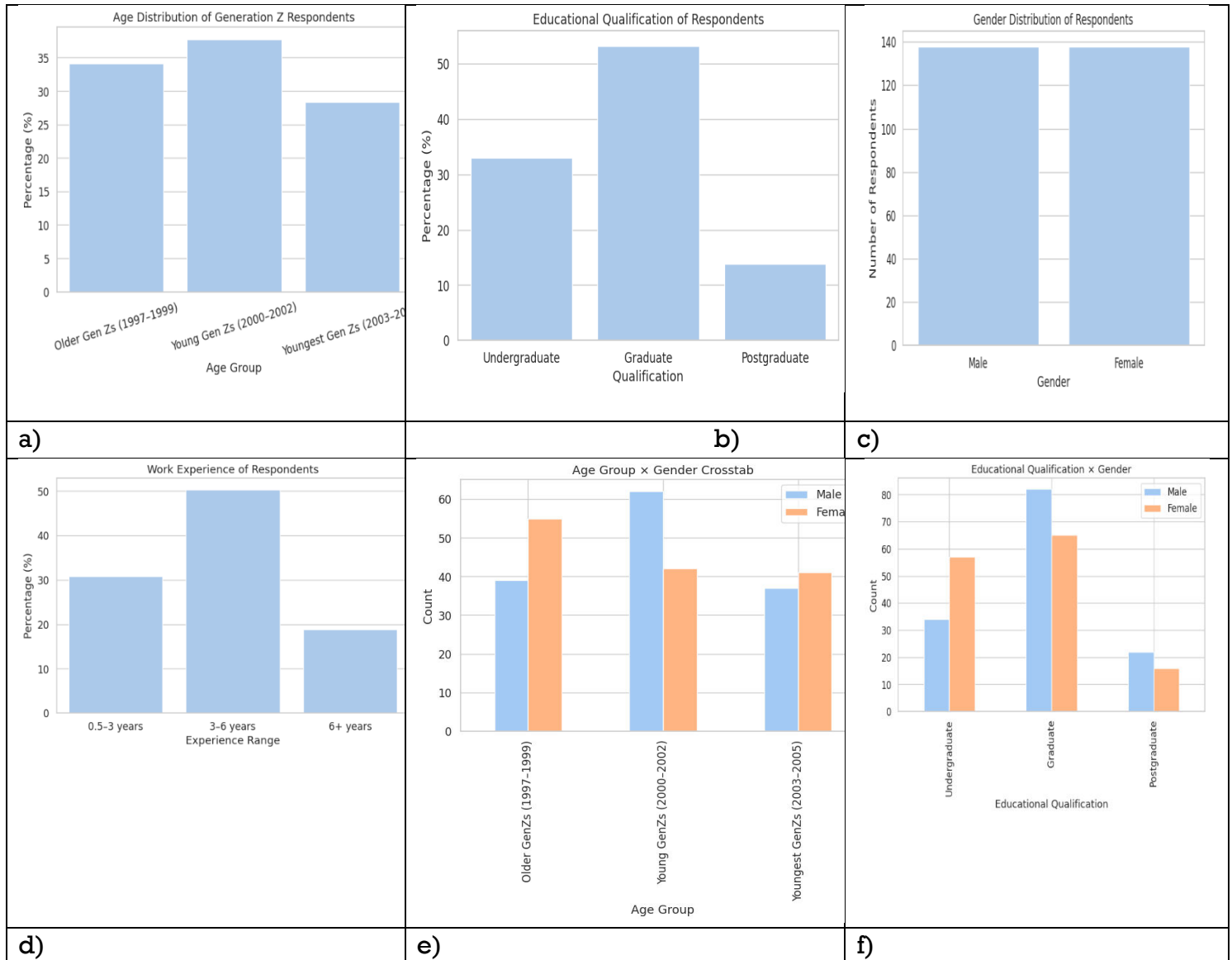
Figure 2: Descriptive statistics: a) Age Distribution of Generation Z Respondents in Sri Lanka's IT Industry, b) Educational Qualifications of Respondents, c) Gender Distribution of Respondents, d) Distribution of Respondents by Work Experience, e) Cross-Tabulation of Age Group and Gender, f) Cross-Tabulation of Educational Qualification and Gender, g) Cross-Tabulation of Work Experience and Gender, h) Cross-Tabulation of Work Experience and Educational Qualification, i) Cross-Tabulation of Age Group and Educational Qualification and j) ross-Tabulation of Age Group and Work Experience

4.2 Favourite Leadership Traits

The Favourite Leadership Traits presents a comparative analysis of the leadership traits most valued by Generation Z employees in Sri Lanka's IT industry, as illustrated in Figures 3a–d. The results reveal distinct preferences across four major leadership styles Agile, Servant, Collaborative, and Authentic. As shown in Figure a, within Agile Leadership, flexibility (44.2%) and adaptability (34.1%) are the most preferred traits, demonstrating Generation Z's appreciation for leaders who are responsive and versatile in dynamic work

environments. In Servant Leadership (Figure b), decision-making responsibility stands out as the dominant trait (50%), followed by supporting organizational goals (26.1%), indicating that Gen Z values accountable leaders who align with collective objectives. For Collaborative Leadership (Figure c), problem-solving skills (50%) are most highly rated, underscoring a pragmatic focus on effective solutions and team engagement. Lastly, Figure d on Authentic Leadership highlights self-awareness (46%) and balanced processing (33.7%) as key preferences, reflecting a strong inclination toward ethical, transparent, and self-aware leadership. Overall, the findings suggest that Generation Z professionals in Sri Lanka's IT sector favor leaders who are flexible, decisive, solution-oriented, and authentic traits that collectively foster trust, adaptability, and effectiveness in modern organizational settings.
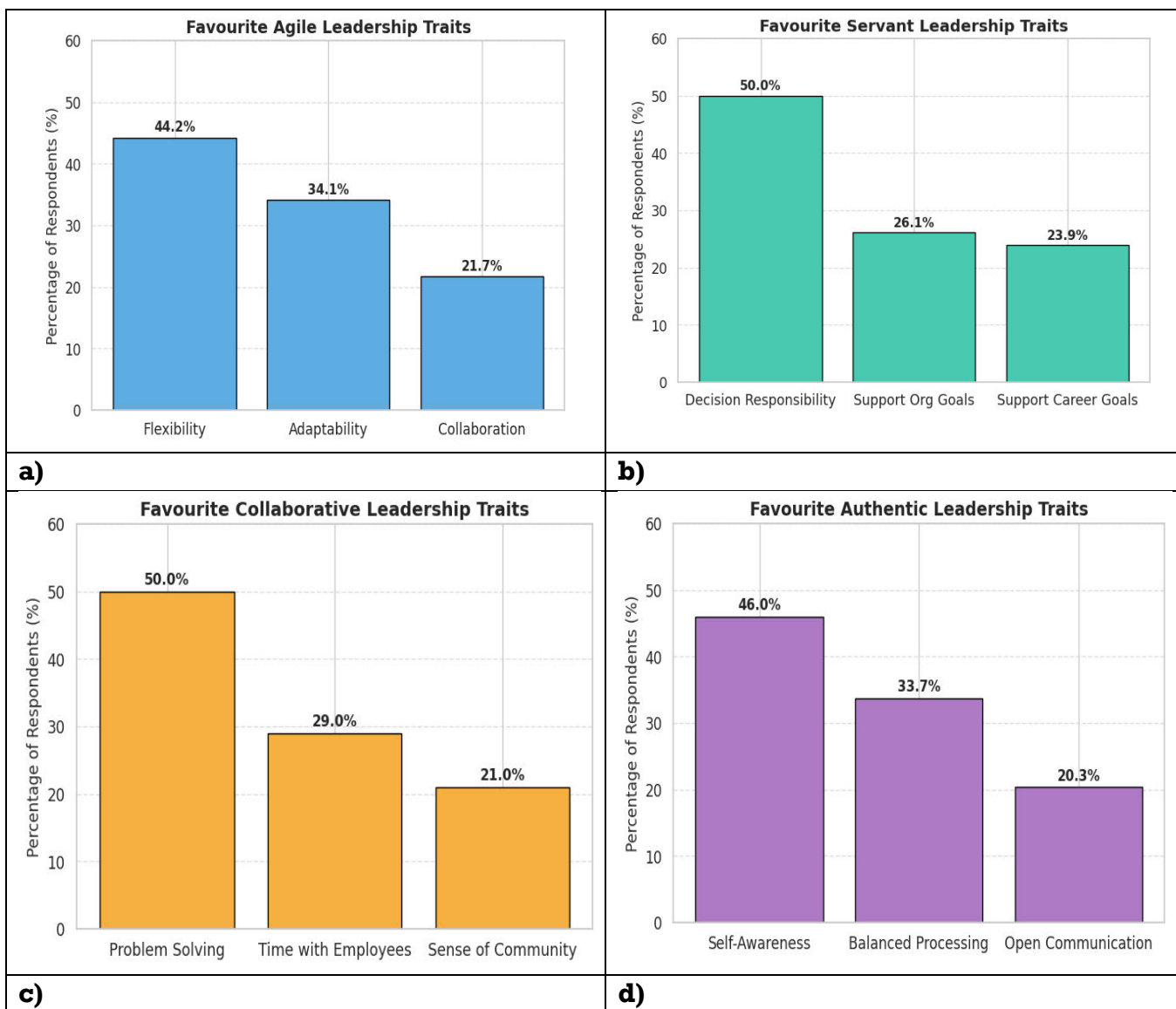

a) Favourite Agile Leadership Traits

b) Favourite Servant Leadership Traits

c) Favourite Collaborative Leadership Traits

d) Favourite Authentic Leadership Traits

Figure 3: Favourite Leadership Traits a) Favourite Agile Leadership Traits, b) Favourite Servant Leadership Traits, c) Favourite Collaborative Leadership Traits and d) Favourite Authentic Leadership Traits

4.3 Favorite Trait - Demographic Analysis

Figure 4 illustrates the demographic analysis of Generation Z's favorite leadership traits across four leadership styles a) Agile Leadership, b) Servant Leadership, c) Collaborative Leadership, and d) Authentic Leadership. The figure reveals distinct patterns shaped by age, gender, educational qualification, and work experience. In Agile Leadership, adaptability and flexibility emerge as dominant traits, particularly valued by early- and mid-career employees who emphasize responsiveness and strategic agility, while collaboration receives moderate recognition. Servant Leadership highlights a preference for decisiveness among older cohorts and graduates, whereas early-career employees and females prioritize support for career growth, reflecting a blend of developmental and organizational focus. Collaborative Leadership emphasizes problem-solving as the most valued trait across demographics, though younger and less experienced respondents appreciate leaders who invest time with employees, underscoring interpersonal engagement. Finally, Authentic Leadership underscores the importance of self-awareness and balanced processing, especially among older and highly educated respondents, while open communication remains central for early-career employees. Overall, Figure 4.4 demonstrates that Generation Z values leadership styles that balance adaptability, decisiveness, collaboration, and authenticity, with preferences differing based on demographic and experiential contexts.
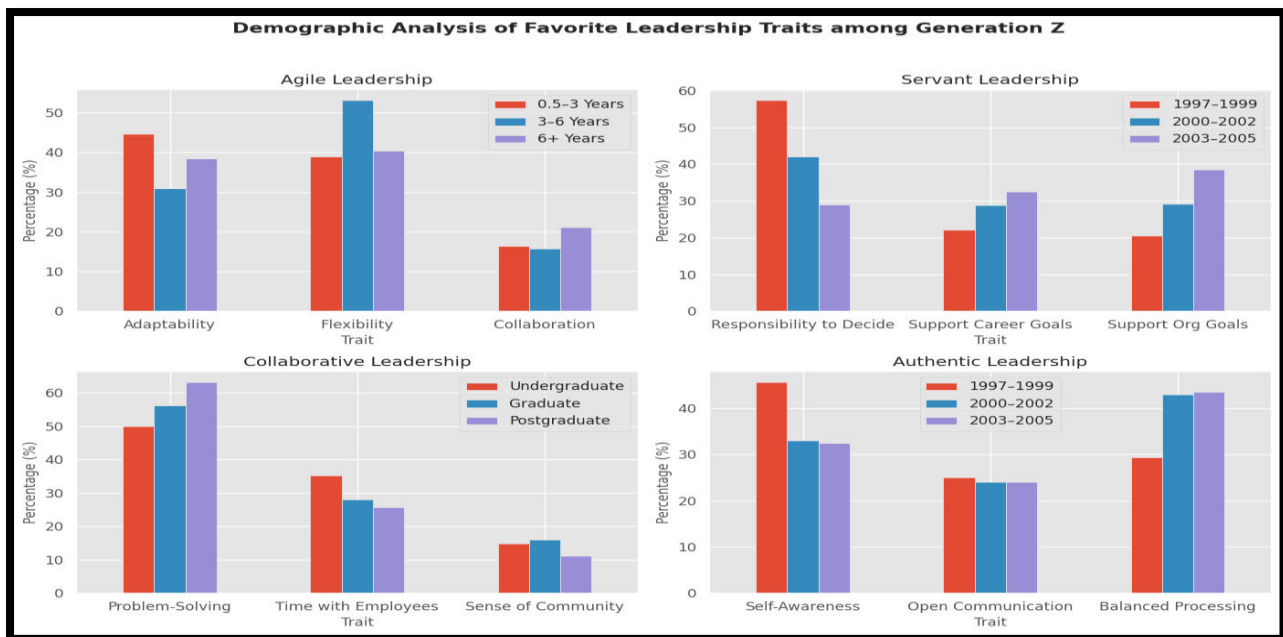

Figure 4: a) Agile leadership, b) servant leadership, c) collaborative leadership and d) authentic leadership

4.4 Variable Analysis

Figure 5 illustrates the comparative analysis of Generation Z employees' perceptions of managerial leadership traits Servant, Agile, Collaborative, and Authentic Leadership and their influence on Job Satisfaction and Motivation across gender, age, educational qualification, and work experience. The results reveal that Agile Leadership recorded the highest overall mean (M = 4.34), indicating a strong agreement that managers exhibit adaptability, flexibility, and responsiveness traits highly valued in dynamic work environments. Motivation (M = 4.17) and Job Satisfaction (M = 3.99) also fall within the high agreement range, highlighting that managers play a key role in maintaining engagement and satisfaction among Gen Z employees. Collaborative Leadership (M = 4.09) similarly reflects high agreement, emphasizing teamwork and problem-solving as key managerial strengths. In contrast, Servant Leadership (M = 3.91) and Authentic Leadership (M = 3.85) show moderate agreement, suggesting that while managers demonstrate empathy, ethical conduct, and self-awareness, these traits are perceived less consistently. Minor variations across gender and education indicate that females and postgraduates slightly rate leadership traits higher, while age and work experience trends suggest that perceptions of managerial effectiveness strengthen with professional maturity. Overall, Figure 4.5 underscores that Generation Z employees in Sri Lanka's IT industry perceive their managers as agile, collaborative, and motivating leaders, with consistently positive yet nuanced evaluations across demographic groups.
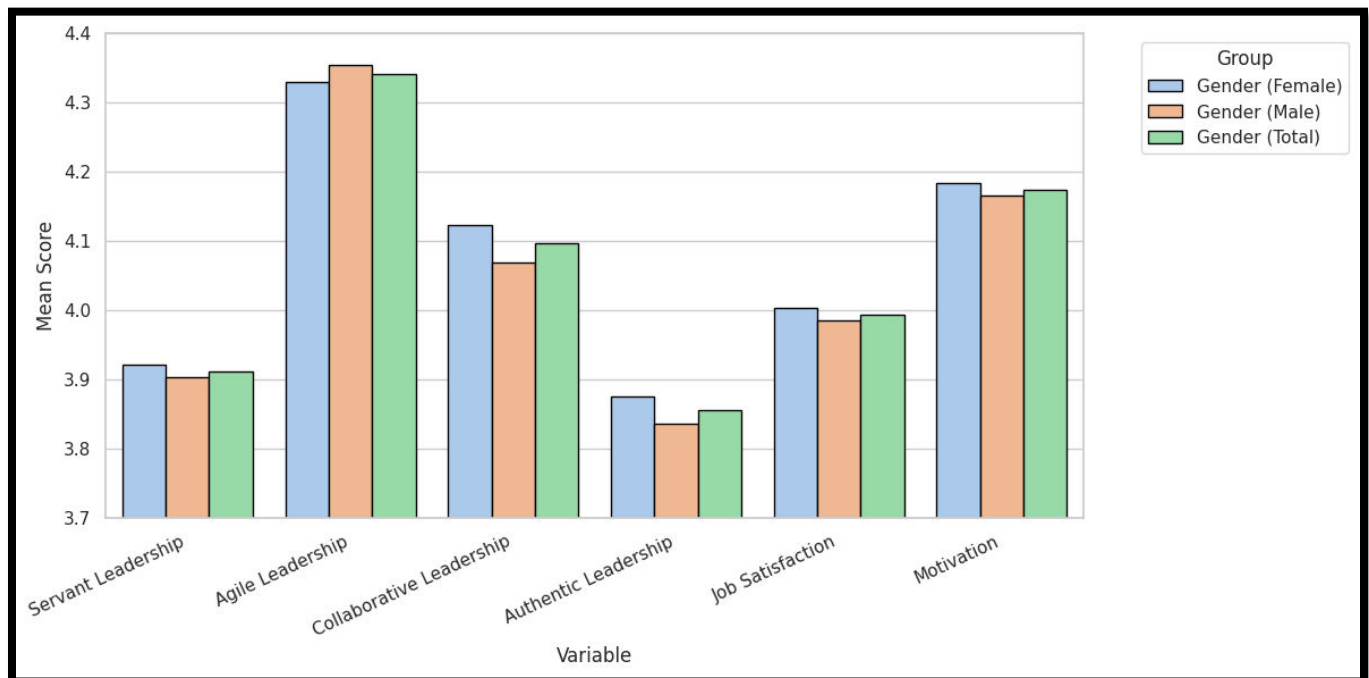

Figure 5: Mean Comparison of Leadership Traits, Job Satisfaction, and Motivation Across Demographic Variables

4.5 Inferential Statistics

4.5.1 Regression analysis:

The regression analysis in table 2 examined the impact of four leadership styles Servant, Agile, Authentic, and Collaborative on employees' Job Satisfaction and Motivation. The results indicate that all leadership styles are significant positive predictors of both outcomes ($p < 0.05$). Servant and Authentic Leadership showed particularly strong effects, with higher β values for both Job Satisfaction and Motivation, suggesting that employees perceive these leadership traits as more influential in shaping their workplace experience. Agile and Collaborative Leadership also had positive impacts, though slightly lower in magnitude. Overall, the findings highlight that effective leadership positively contributes to employee satisfaction and motivation, with different styles exerting varying levels of influence.

Table 2: Impact of Leadership Styles on Job Satisfaction and Motivation – Regression Results

Leadership Style	Outcome	R	R²	Adjusted R²	B	β	t	p-value	Interpretation
Servant Leadership	Job Satisfaction	0.875	0.803	0.730	0.56	0.55	10.94	0.000	Significant positive predictor
Agile Leadership	Job Satisfaction	0.747	0.599	0.597	0.468	0.547	10.69	0.000	Significant positive predictor
Authentic Leadership	Job Satisfaction	0.800	0.640	0.639	0.40	0.80	20.44	0.000	Significant positive predictor
Collaborative Leadership	Job Satisfaction	0.600	0.360	0.358	0.30	0.60	12.54	0.000	Significant positive predictor
Servant Leadership	Motivation	0.756	0.572	0.570	0.412	0.61	13.03	0.000	Significant positive predictor
Agile Leadership	Motivation	0.620	0.584	0.580	0.320	0.62	13.56	0.000	Significant positive predictor

Authentic Leadership	Motivation	0.750	0.563	0.561	0.48	0.75	18.13	0.000	Significant positive predictor
Collaborative Leadership	Motivation	0.670	0.589	0.567	0.54	0.67	15.40	0.000	Significant positive predictor

4.5.2: T-Test:

The paired sample T-Test in table 3 examined differences between employees' perceptions of leadership styles Agile, Servant, Collaborative, and Authentic and their Job Satisfaction and Motivation. Agile Leadership was consistently rated higher than both outcomes, indicating a strong positive perception. Servant and Authentic Leadership showed significant differences, with some ratings lower than the corresponding outcome, suggesting partial alignment. Collaborative Leadership did not differ significantly from Job Satisfaction but was lower than Motivation, highlighting variability in its perceived impact. Overall, the results suggest that while leadership styles influence employee perceptions, their effect on Job Satisfaction and Motivation varies across styles.

Table 3: Comparison of Leadership Styles with Job Satisfaction and Motivation Using Paired Sample T-Test

Leadership Style	Outcome	Mean (Leadership)	Mean (Outcome)	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	t-value	df	p-value	Significance
Agile	Job Satisfaction	4.3417	3.9937	0.3480	0.3615	15.992	275	0.000	Significant
Servant	Job Satisfaction	3.9123	3.9937	-0.0814	0.5090	-2.656	275	0.008	Significant
Collaborative	Job Satisfaction	3.9572	3.9937	-0.0364	0.5178	-1.169	275	0.243	Not Significant
Authentic	Job Satisfaction	3.8560	3.9937	-0.1377	0.4326	-5.289	275	0.000	Significant

Agile	Motivation	4.3417	4.1744	0.1673	0.2874	9.672	275	0.000	Significant
Servant	Motivation	3.9123	4.1744	-0.2621	0.3381	-12.876	275	0.000	Significant
Collaborative	Motivation	3.9572	4.1744	-0.2171	0.6012	-6.000	275	0.000	Significant
Authentic	Motivation	3.8560	4.1744	-0.3184	0.4902	-10.792	275	0.000	Significant

4.6 Summary of the findings:

The analysis indicates that Servant, Agile, Authentic, and Collaborative leadership styles are positively associated with Job Satisfaction and Motivation among employees. Regression results show that these leadership styles significantly predict employee outcomes, with moderate to strong effect sizes, as reflected in the beta values and high R^2 values. Pairwise comparisons reveal that most leadership styles significantly influence both Job Satisfaction and Motivation, except for Collaborative Leadership, which does not significantly impact Job Satisfaction. Overall, Servant and Authentic Leadership have the strongest influence, highlighting the importance of supportive and value-driven leadership in enhancing employee engagement and motivation.

4.7 Test of Hypotheses:

The analysis in table 4 and 5 indicates that Servant, Agile, Authentic, and Collaborative leadership styles are positively associated with Job Satisfaction and Motivation among employees. Regression results show that these leadership styles significantly predict employee outcomes, with moderate to strong effect sizes, as reflected in the beta values and high R^2 values. Pairwise comparisons reveal that most leadership styles significantly influence both Job Satisfaction and Motivation, except for Collaborative Leadership, which does not significantly impact Job Satisfaction. Overall, Servant and Authentic Leadership have the strongest influence, highlighting the importance of supportive and value-driven leadership in enhancing employee engagement and motivation.

Table 4: Summary - Hypotheses Testing I

Variable	R	R²	Significance (p-value)	Hypothesis No.	B / Beta	Significance (p-value)	Acceptance
Servant Leadership – Job Satisfaction	0.88	0.803	0.000	H1	B = 0.56 / β = 0.55	0.000	Accepted
Agile Leadership – Job Satisfaction	0.75	0.599	0.000	H2	B = 0.47 / β = 0.55	0.000	Accepted
Authentic Leadership – Job Satisfaction	0.80	0.640	0.000	H3	B = 0.40 / β = 0.80	0.000	Accepted
Collaborative Leadership – Job Satisfaction	0.60	0.360	0.000	H4	B = 0.30 / β = 0.60	0.000	Accepted
Servant Leadership – Motivation	0.76	0.572	0.000	H5	B = 0.412 / β = 0.61	0.000	Accepted
Agile Leadership – Motivation	0.77	0.584	0.000	H6	B = 0.320 / β = 0.62	0.000	Accepted
Authentic Leadership – Motivation	0.75	0.563	0.000	H7	B = 0.48 / β = 0.75	0.000	Accepted
Collaborative Leadership – Motivation	0.77	0.589	0.000	H8	B = 0.54 / β = 0.67	0.000	Accepted

Table 5: Summary - Hypotheses Testing II

Hypothesis	Pair Compared	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value	Result	Hypothesis Statement
H1	Servant Leadership vs. Job Satisfaction	−0.081	−2.656	0.008	Significant	Accepted
H2	Agile Leadership vs. Job Satisfaction	0.348	15.992	0.000	Significant	Accepted
H3	Authentic Leadership vs. Job Satisfaction	−0.138	−5.289	0.000	Significant	Accepted
H4	Collaborative Leadership vs. Job Satisfaction	−0.036	−1.169	0.243	Not Significant	Rejected
H5	Servant Leadership vs. Motivation	−0.262	12.876	0.000	Significant	Accepted
H6	Agile Leadership vs. Motivation	0.167	9.672	0.000	Significant	Accepted
H7	Authentic Leadership vs. Motivation	−0.318	10.792	0.000	Significant	Accepted
H8	Collaborative Leadership vs. Motivation	−0.217	−6.000	0.000	Significant	Accepted

4.8 Discussion: The discussion highlights that Generation Z employees in Sri Lanka's IT sector exhibit patterns consistent with global workforce trends in terms of age, education, gender, and work experience, with mid-career professionals and graduates forming the majority. Leadership traits preferred by Gen Z emphasize flexibility, adaptability, problem-solving, self-awareness, and ethical decision-making, with demographic factors influencing specific preferences. Servant and Authentic Leadership emerged as the strongest predictors of job satisfaction and motivation, reflecting Gen Z's desire for supportive, transparent, and purpose-driven leadership. Agile and Collaborative Leadership also positively influence motivation, though Collaborative Leadership has a lower impact on satisfaction, likely due to cultural and organizational contexts favoring clear guidance. Overall, the findings indicate that leadership style significantly shapes both satisfaction and motivation, with authenticity and employee-centered approaches being particularly impactful for engaging Gen Z professionals.

5. Conclusion and future scope: This study concludes that leadership styles significantly influence job satisfaction and motivation among Gen Z employees in Sri Lanka's IT industry, with Servant Leadership most strongly impacting job satisfaction and Authentic Leadership driving motivation. Gen Z employees value traits such as self-awareness, ethical decision-making, flexibility, and employee-centric leadership, highlighting the need for organizations to adopt adaptive, participative, and reflective leadership practices. The research underscores the importance of aligning leadership strategies with employee career stages, promoting continuous feedback, and fostering a flexible and engaging work environment. For future research, longitudinal, cross-cultural, and qualitative studies are recommended to explore evolving leadership preferences, the role of organizational culture, diversity considerations, well-being, and the impact of technological disruptions, providing deeper insights into optimizing leadership effectiveness and employee outcomes in dynamic, tech-driven workplaces.

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