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Explaining the Fit of a Leadership Model Based on the Characteristics and Expectations of the New Generation

ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to explain and validate a leadership model based on the characteristics and expectations of the new generation among headquarters employees of the Iranian National Tax Administration.This study employed a quantitative, applied, descriptive-correlational design using a cross-sectional survey approach. The statistical population consisted of headquarters employees of the Iranian National Tax Administration. Based on Cochran's formula, 384 participants were required; however, 400 questionnaires were distributed and 371 valid questionnaires were ultimately analyzed. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire designed to assess six dimensions of leadership aligned with the characteristics and expectations of the new generation, including individual and ethical characteristics of the leader, interactive leadership and social capital, generation-oriented human capital management and development, managerial and strategic competencies, digital transformation and data-driven governance, and institutional governance and leadership legitimacy. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 29 and SmartPLS 4. Descriptive statistics, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, reliability and validity assessments, and structural equation modeling based on the partial least squares approach were used to evaluate the proposed model. The results confirmed the adequacy of the sample for factor analysis (KMO = 0.885; Bartlett's χ^2 = 10451.900, $p < 0.001$). All questionnaire items demonstrated acceptable factor loadings and significant t-values, confirming measurement validity. The structural model showed that leadership in the new generation had significant positive effects on institutional governance and leadership legitimacy ($\beta = 0.893$, $p < 0.001$), interactive leadership and social capital ($\beta = 0.829$, $p < 0.001$), managerial and strategic competencies ($\beta = 0.811$, $p < 0.001$), digital transformation and data-driven governance ($\beta = 0.788$, $p < 0.001$), generation-oriented human capital management and development ($\beta = 0.783$, $p < 0.001$), and individual and ethical characteristics of the leader ($\beta = 0.643$, $p < 0.001$). The model demonstrated strong explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.414$–0.797), acceptable predictive relevance ($Q^2 = 0.220$–0.335), and a strong overall fit (GOF = 0.428). Reliability and convergent validity indicators also met recommended thresholds. The findings indicate that leadership aligned with the expectations of the new generation is a multidimensional construct encompassing ethical leadership, social interaction, human capital development, strategic competence, digital transformation, and institutional legitimacy. Among these dimensions, institutional governance and leadership legitimacy emerged as the most influential component, highlighting the importance of transparency, accountability, and organizational trust for younger employees. The validated model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding contemporary leadership requirements and offers practical guidance for organizations seeking to enhance employee engagement, retention, and organizational effectiveness in an increasingly multigenerational and digitally driven work environment.

Keywords: Leadership Fit, New Generation, Generation Z, Leadership Model, Institutional Governance, Leadership Legitimacy

Introduction

Organizations across the world are experiencing a profound generational transition in their workforce, and this transition has made leadership fit one of the central concerns of contemporary management research. The entry and expansion of younger cohorts, particularly Generation Z and the late millennial generation, have changed expectations about authority, communication, participation, technology, ethics, flexibility, learning, and organizational legitimacy. In traditional organizational structures, leadership was often evaluated through hierarchy, control, experience, and formal authority; however, the new generation tends to evaluate leadership through responsiveness, authenticity, developmental support, transparency, social responsibility, digital fluency, and meaningful participation. This change has created a need to explain which leadership characteristics are most compatible with the values, behavioral patterns, and expectations of the new generation. Accordingly, leadership can no longer be understood only as a set of individual traits or managerial skills, but must be examined as a multidimensional construct shaped by generational values, organizational context, technological transformation, and institutional expectations [1-4].

The debate on generational differences in organizations has expanded because workplaces increasingly include employees from multiple age cohorts with different work values, motivational patterns, communication styles, and expectations of leadership. Although some studies caution against exaggerated assumptions about generational differences, research continues to show that employees' age cohort, socialization context, technological exposure, and career expectations influence how they interpret organizational practices and leadership behaviors [5-7]. Generational conflict may emerge when leadership practices are designed around the assumptions of older cohorts but are applied to younger employees who expect more autonomy, faster feedback, meaningful involvement, and digital responsiveness [6]. Therefore, explaining the fit of a leadership model for the new generation requires a balanced perspective that recognizes both common organizational needs and cohort-specific expectations.

Generation Z has received particular attention because it entered organizational and educational environments after growing up in a highly digital, networked, and rapidly changing social context. This generation is often described as technologically fluent, socially aware, sensitive to fairness, inclined toward rapid communication, and attentive to career development and psychological safety. Their expectations upon entering the workforce include supportive leadership, clear communication, opportunities for growth, purposeful work, and organizational environments that respect individuality and participation [1, 8, 9]. Studies on Generation Z values show that this cohort may act as a disruptor for conventional educational and organizational institutions because its members expect more adaptive, value-oriented, and technology-enabled systems [2]. In this regard, leadership models that ignore the new generation's expectations may face reduced engagement, weaker commitment, and higher turnover intentions.

Leadership style is one of the most important mechanisms through which organizations respond to generational diversity. Research on leadership preferences across generations indicates that employees from different cohorts may not respond similarly to the same leadership approach, especially when their views of authority, autonomy, legacy, and organizational responsibility differ [10, 11]. Intergenerational leadership has therefore been proposed as an approach for managing diversity, technological change, and differences in expectations among employees from various age groups [4]. In this perspective, effective leadership should not simply impose a uniform managerial style, but should create alignment between organizational goals and the needs of different generational groups. For the new generation, this alignment requires leaders

who can combine ethical credibility, communication competence, digital awareness, human capital development, and strategic adaptability.

The importance of leadership fit is also intensified by the changing nature of employee engagement. In a digital and multigenerational world, engagement strategies are increasingly linked to the ability of organizations to unlock human capital, promote collaboration, and use digital tools to support meaningful work [12]. Digital workplace design has also been identified as a critical factor in employee engagement, because employees increasingly expect accessible communication, flexible work processes, transparent information flow, and technology-supported collaboration [13]. For younger employees, digital transformation is not merely a technical process; it is part of how they experience organizational responsiveness, inclusion, and leadership effectiveness. Therefore, a leadership model for the new generation must include digital transformation and data-driven governance as essential components rather than peripheral organizational issues.

Human capital management is another key dimension in explaining leadership for the new generation. Studies on talent management and employer branding emphasize that attracting and retaining Generation Z requires innovative human resource practices, developmental opportunities, meaningful work, and a strong organizational identity [8, 14]. Employee retention research similarly shows that psychological contracts, motivation, job embeddedness, and perceived organizational support play important roles in retaining young talent [15-17]. These findings suggest that leadership cannot be separated from human capital development. A leader who fits the expectations of the new generation must be able to support learning, recognize individual potential, create developmental pathways, and strengthen employees' connection to the organization.

The changing workforce also has implications for productivity and organizational performance. Literature on workforce transformation highlights that demographic change, technological expectations, and shifting work values influence productivity, cooperation, and organizational stability [18]. In industries undergoing rapid change, such as energy and technology-intensive sectors, Generation Z has been associated with a paradigm shift in organizational dynamics, requiring managers to reconsider conventional assumptions about work, authority, and engagement [19]. This is particularly important in public and bureaucratic organizations, where formal rules, hierarchy, and institutional procedures may create tension with the expectations of younger employees. In such contexts, leadership fit depends not only on interpersonal skills but also on the ability to create legitimacy, fairness, transparency, and institutional responsiveness.

Ethics and values are also central to leadership in the new generation. Cross-generational research on value orientation and moral reasoning shows that Generation Z may give considerable importance to principled moral reasoning, social responsibility, and ethical consistency [20]. Studies on corporate social responsibility and generational motivation further indicate that younger generations may be attentive to the social meaning of organizational behavior and may evaluate leadership through its commitment to transformation, responsibility, and sustainability [21]. Similarly, research on sustainable and green behavior among different generations shows that generational groups may differ in how they interpret responsibility, sustainability, and ethical consumption [22]. These findings imply that the individual and ethical characteristics of leaders remain important, but they are increasingly interpreted in relation to broader institutional and social expectations.

Social capital and interactive leadership are also essential to the leadership expectations of the new generation. Younger employees often expect leaders to communicate openly, encourage participation, and create relational trust rather than relying only on positional authority. Research on millennial community leaders during the pandemic showed that adaptive leadership behaviors, communication, and community responsiveness were crucial in uncertain and complex conditions [23].

Studies on knowledge sharing and entrepreneurial behavior among Generation Y and Generation Z also demonstrate that collaborative environments can strengthen innovation and new venture creation [24]. Likewise, online communities and social movements have shaped Generation Z's sense of participation, knowledge sharing, and collective action [25]. Therefore, a leadership model suited to the new generation should emphasize interaction, trust, social participation, and the construction of social capital within organizations.

At the same time, leadership for the new generation requires managerial and strategic competencies. Contemporary organizations need leaders who can manage complexity, innovation, and transformation while maintaining employee engagement and organizational coherence. A new model for 21st-century leadership emphasizes innovation, adaptability, and future-oriented leadership capacities as essential for organizational development [26]. Leadership competency measurement research also highlights the need for valid instruments that assess the performance-related competencies of emerging leaders [27]. In this sense, leadership fit for the new generation is not only about being supportive or ethical; it also requires strategic judgment, decision-making capability, technological literacy, and the ability to translate organizational goals into participatory and meaningful practices.

The literature also shows that the boundaries between generations are not always simple or uniform. For example, studies on intra-generational differences among millennial leaders show that even within the same generation, differences may exist in leadership behavior, ego states, and workplace orientation [28]. This means that leadership models should avoid simplistic stereotypes and instead identify empirically grounded dimensions that can explain leadership effectiveness across different expectations within the new workforce. Similarly, research on differentiated empowering leadership among Generation MZ employees indicates that empowerment can have complex effects, including unintended consequences such as knowledge hiding when leadership is perceived as unequal or selectively distributed [29]. Thus, empowerment alone is not sufficient; leadership must be perceived as fair, consistent, inclusive, and institutionally legitimate.

Generational expectations also extend beyond the workplace into broader social and political behavior. Demographic profiling research shows that generational groups can influence collective attitudes, participation, and public decision-making, demonstrating that generational characteristics are relevant not only for organizations but also for institutional governance and social legitimacy [30]. In entrepreneurial contexts, Generation Y and Generation Z have also been studied in relation to social sustainability, showing that younger generations may connect business activity with social responsibility and long-term societal value [31]. These studies reinforce the idea that leadership for the new generation must be understood within a wider framework of governance, legitimacy, responsibility, and social embeddedness.

Turnover and retention studies further show why leadership fit matters. Research on employee turnover antecedents across generations reveals that while some turnover factors are common across cohorts, others are generation-specific and connected to development, recognition, work meaning, and leadership quality [32]. Studies on young talent retention also show that psychological contract fulfillment is essential for maintaining commitment among younger employees [15]. When leadership fails to meet expectations related to fairness, growth, communication, and support, young employees may experience weaker organizational attachment. Therefore, organizations that seek to retain new-generation employees must design leadership practices that are not only administratively effective but also psychologically and relationally meaningful.

The public sector and large administrative organizations face particular challenges in this regard. Their leadership systems are often embedded in formal rules, centralized procedures, and institutional routines, while the new generation expects

speed, transparency, responsiveness, and participatory communication. As a result, the fit between leadership models and generational expectations becomes a strategic issue for institutional effectiveness. In such organizations, leadership must integrate ethical behavior, social capital, human resource development, strategic competence, digital transformation, and institutional legitimacy. This integrated view corresponds with emerging literature suggesting that leadership in contemporary organizations should be intergenerational, technology-aware, developmental, and value-centered [4, 33, 34].

Accordingly, the present study is grounded in the assumption that leadership based on the characteristics and expectations of the new generation is a multidimensional construct. The relevant dimensions include the individual and ethical characteristics of the leader, interactive leadership and social capital, generation-oriented human capital management and development, managerial and strategic competencies, digital transformation and data-driven governance, and institutional governance and leadership legitimacy. These dimensions reflect the major themes in the literature: the importance of ethical and value-based leadership, the role of interaction and social capital, the necessity of talent development and retention, the influence of digital transformation, and the need for institutional legitimacy in contemporary organizations [9, 11-13, 20, 26].

Despite the growing body of research on generational differences, Generation Z expectations, leadership styles, and talent management, there remains a need for empirical models that examine the fit of leadership dimensions in specific organizational contexts. Much of the existing literature addresses isolated issues such as retention, engagement, digital work, moral values, or leadership preferences, while fewer studies integrate these components into a comprehensive model of leadership fit for the new generation. This gap is especially important in public administrative organizations, where leadership effectiveness is closely related to institutional legitimacy, service quality, workforce stability, and adaptation to digital transformation. Therefore, developing and testing a model that explains leadership based on the characteristics and expectations of the new generation can contribute to both leadership theory and managerial practice.

The aim of the present study was to explain the fit of a leadership model based on the characteristics and expectations of the new generation among headquarters employees of the Iranian National Tax Administration.

Methodology

The present study was conducted using a quantitative, applied, descriptive-correlational survey design. The purpose of the study was to examine and explain the fit of a leadership model based on the characteristics and expectations of the new generation. Since the study aimed to evaluate the relationships among the components of the proposed leadership model and assess the adequacy of the model in an organizational context, the research design was cross-sectional and model-testing in nature. Data were collected at one point in time through a structured questionnaire, and the statistical analyses were performed to determine the validity of the measurement model, the relationships among the variables, and the overall fit of the leadership model.

The statistical population consisted of all headquarters employees of the Iranian National Tax Administration. Based on the available organizational statistics, the total number of employees of the Iranian National Tax Administration was 27,825, and headquarters employees were estimated to constitute approximately 10 to 20 percent of this workforce. Accordingly, the accessible statistical population for the present study was estimated at approximately 5,560 employees. The sample size was calculated using Cochran's formula at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Based on this calculation, the required sample size was estimated to be 384 respondents. To compensate for incomplete or unusable questionnaires, 400

questionnaires were distributed among the target population, and finally, 385 complete and valid questionnaires were returned and entered into the final analysis. The sampling method was convenience sampling due to the organizational accessibility of respondents and the practical limitations of data collection among headquarters employees.

The main instrument for data collection was a researcher-made questionnaire designed to measure the components of leadership based on the characteristics and expectations of the new generation. The questionnaire consisted of two main sections. The first section included demographic information such as gender, age, education level, work experience, employment status, and organizational position. The second section included items related to the main variables and dimensions of the leadership model. These items were designed to assess employees' perceptions of leadership characteristics, expectations of the new generation, organizational leadership requirements, and related behavioral and managerial components.

The questionnaire items were scored using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." In this scale, "strongly agree" received a score of 5, "agree" received a score of 4, "somewhat agree" received a score of 3, "disagree" received a score of 2, and "strongly disagree" received a score of 1. Higher scores indicated stronger agreement with the proposed leadership indicators and greater perceived relevance of the measured component. The use of a closed-ended Likert-type questionnaire made it possible to quantify respondents' perceptions and statistically examine the structure and fit of the proposed model.

The validity of the questionnaire was assessed through content validity and construct validity. For content validity, the initial version of the questionnaire was reviewed by university professors and experts in management, leadership, organizational behavior, and human resource management. Their comments were used to revise unclear items, remove overlapping statements, and improve the conceptual alignment of the items with the research objectives. Construct validity was examined through measurement model assessment in structural equation modeling. In this process, factor loadings, average variance extracted, composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha, and discriminant validity indices were evaluated. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficients, and values above the acceptable threshold were considered evidence of satisfactory internal consistency.

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS 29 and SmartPLS 4. Before conducting the main analyses, the data were screened to identify incomplete responses, outliers, and possible entry errors. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to describe the demographic characteristics of respondents and the distribution of the main research variables. The preliminary statistical analysis also included the examination of assumptions required for inferential analysis, including normality, multicollinearity, and the adequacy of the dataset for model testing.

In the inferential stage, Pearson correlation analysis and regression analysis were used to examine the relationships among the main variables. In addition, structural equation modeling based on the partial least squares approach was used to test the proposed leadership model. The measurement model was evaluated through factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and discriminant validity. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio. Items with weak factor loadings or insufficient contribution to the construct were reviewed according to statistical and theoretical considerations.

After confirming the adequacy of the measurement model, the structural model was assessed. Path coefficients, t-values, significance levels, coefficient of determination, effect size, predictive relevance, and collinearity statistics were examined to

determine the strength and significance of the relationships among the model variables. Bootstrapping was applied to test the significance of the path coefficients. Finally, model fit was evaluated using indices such as SRMR and NFI, along with the explanatory and predictive criteria of the structural model. The results of these analyses provided the statistical basis for explaining the fit of the leadership model based on the characteristics and expectations of the new generation.

Findings and Results

The demographic findings showed that the respondents were headquarters employees of the Iranian National Tax Administration. Among the 371 respondents, 241 participants were men (65.0%) and 130 were women (35.0%). In terms of age, 27 respondents (7.3%) were younger than 30 years, 62 respondents (16.7%) were between 31 and 35 years, 108 respondents (29.1%) were between 36 and 40 years, 100 respondents (27.0%) were between 41 and 45 years, and 74 respondents (19.9%) were 46 years old or older. Regarding educational level, 221 participants (59.6%) held a bachelor's degree, 138 participants (37.2%) held a master's degree, and 12 participants (3.2%) held a doctoral degree. With respect to work experience, 54 respondents (14.6%) had 1 to 5 years of service, 98 respondents (26.4%) had 6 to 10 years of service, 107 respondents (28.8%) had 11 to 15 years of service, 82 respondents (22.1%) had 16 to 20 years of service, and 30 respondents (8.1%) had 21 years or more of service. Overall, the sample was mainly composed of male employees, respondents aged between 36 and 45 years, employees with bachelor's and master's degrees, and individuals with moderate organizational work experience.

Table 1

Normality Test of the Research Variables

Variable	K-S Statistic	df	Sig.	S-W Statistics	df	Sig.	Result
Individual and Ethical Characteristics of the Leader	0.060	360	0.004	0.993	360	0.075	Non-normal
Interactive Leadership and Social Capital	0.062	360	0.002	0.989	360	0.008	Non-normal
Generation-Oriented Human Capital Management and Development	0.063	360	0.001	0.991	360	0.021	Non-normal
Managerial and Strategic Competencies	0.073	360	0.000	0.987	360	0.002	Non-normal
Digital Transformation and Data-Driven Governance	0.107	360	0.000	0.981	360	0.000	Non-normal
Institutional Governance and Leadership Legitimacy	0.081	360	0.000	0.984	360	0.001	Non-normal

The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated that the distribution of the main research variables was not normal, because the significance levels were generally lower than the 0.05 threshold. Therefore, considering the non-normal distribution of the variables and the objective of testing the structural model, the partial least squares approach was used for model estimation. This approach is suitable for analyzing structural equation models when the normality assumption is not fully established and when the focus is on prediction, path estimation, and model fit assessment.

Table 2

Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test

Index	Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.885
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Chi-square	10451.900
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: df	861
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Sig.	0.000

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was 0.885, indicating that the sample had a suitable level of adequacy for factor analysis. In addition, Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant at the 0.001 level, showing that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix and that the variables had sufficient interrelationships for factor extraction. Therefore, the data were appropriate for factor analysis and model validation.

Table 3

Extracted Communalities of Questionnaire Items

Item	Initial Value	Extracted Value
s1	1.000	0.508
s2	1.000	0.627
s3	1.000	0.630
s4	1.000	0.893
s5	1.000	0.583
s6	1.000	0.853
s7	1.000	0.809
s8	1.000	0.685
t1	1.000	0.533
t2	1.000	0.862
t3	1.000	0.733
t4	1.000	0.705
t5	1.000	0.866
t6	1.000	0.838
t7	1.000	0.627
t8	1.000	0.741
b1	1.000	0.751
b2	1.000	0.529
b3	1.000	0.552
b4	1.000	0.611
b5	1.000	0.892
b6	1.000	0.576
b7	1.000	0.627
z1	1.000	0.635
z2	1.000	0.511
z3	1.000	0.593
z4	1.000	0.661
z5	1.000	0.649
z6	1.000	0.594
z7	1.000	0.528
e1	1.000	0.702
e2	1.000	0.721
e3	1.000	0.773
e4	1.000	0.606
e5	1.000	0.474
e6	1.000	0.638
m1	1.000	0.687
m2	1.000	0.626
m3	1.000	0.574
m4	1.000	0.735
m5	1.000	0.840
m6	1.000	0.886

The extracted communalities showed that all questionnaire items had acceptable extracted values, as all values were above 0.40. This indicates that the items had sufficient explanatory power and could appropriately contribute to the factor structure of the research model. Therefore, all items were retained for subsequent confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling.

Table 4

Validity of Measurement Items

Measurement Path	Loading	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value	VIF
b1 ← Generation-Oriented Human Capital Management and Development	0.662	0.037	18.026	0.000	1.333
b2 ← Generation-Oriented Human Capital Management and Development	0.680	0.031	21.795	0.000	1.430
b3 ← Generation-Oriented Human Capital Management and Development	0.641	0.033	19.384	0.000	1.338
b4 ← Generation-Oriented Human Capital Management and Development	0.591	0.042	14.161	0.000	1.340
b5 ← Generation-Oriented Human Capital Management and Development	0.729	0.027	27.448	0.000	1.600
b6 ← Generation-Oriented Human Capital Management and Development	0.672	0.033	20.129	0.000	1.414
b7 ← Generation-Oriented Human Capital Management and Development	0.406	0.058	7.006	0.000	1.137
e1 ← Digital Transformation and Data-Driven Governance	0.801	0.021	38.398	0.000	2.015
e2 ← Digital Transformation and Data-Driven Governance	0.788	0.025	31.852	0.000	1.999
e3 ← Digital Transformation and Data-Driven Governance	0.775	0.028	27.987	0.000	2.013
e4 ← Digital Transformation and Data-Driven Governance	0.731	0.032	23.158	0.000	1.576
e5 ← Digital Transformation and Data-Driven Governance	0.647	0.033	19.840	0.000	1.408
e6 ← Digital Transformation and Data-Driven Governance	0.690	0.034	20.395	0.000	1.454
m1 ← Institutional Governance and Leadership Legitimacy	0.695	0.038	18.331	0.000	1.511
m2 ← Institutional Governance and Leadership Legitimacy	0.698	0.033	21.034	0.000	1.559
m3 ← Institutional Governance and Leadership Legitimacy	0.655	0.043	15.178	0.000	1.419
m4 ← Institutional Governance and Leadership Legitimacy	0.539	0.046	11.651	0.000	1.156
m5 ← Institutional Governance and Leadership Legitimacy	0.605	0.044	13.782	0.000	1.225
m6 ← Institutional Governance and Leadership Legitimacy	0.648	0.039	16.472	0.000	1.280
s1 ← Individual and Ethical Characteristics of the Leader	0.685	0.035	19.702	0.000	1.658
s2 ← Individual and Ethical Characteristics of the Leader	0.749	0.029	26.195	0.000	1.955
s3 ← Individual and Ethical Characteristics of the Leader	0.755	0.025	30.062	0.000	2.073
s4 ← Individual and Ethical Characteristics of the Leader	0.746	0.026	29.022	0.000	2.049
s5 ← Individual and Ethical Characteristics of the Leader	0.669	0.031	21.485	0.000	1.541
s6 ← Individual and Ethical Characteristics of the Leader	0.766	0.024	31.864	0.000	1.873
s7 ← Individual and Ethical Characteristics of the Leader	0.816	0.017	48.089	0.000	2.276
s8 ← Individual and Ethical Characteristics of the Leader	0.702	0.026	26.706	0.000	1.753
t1 ← Interactive Leadership and Social Capital	0.635	0.034	18.546	0.000	1.411
t2 ← Interactive Leadership and Social Capital	0.801	0.022	36.864	0.000	2.208
t3 ← Interactive Leadership and Social Capital	0.803	0.025	31.562	0.000	2.694
t4 ← Interactive Leadership and Social Capital	0.817	0.023	36.045	0.000	2.600
t5 ← Interactive Leadership and Social Capital	0.441	0.048	9.266	0.000	1.290
t6 ← Interactive Leadership and Social Capital	0.525	0.048	10.977	0.000	1.374
t7 ← Interactive Leadership and Social Capital	0.734	0.034	21.520	0.000	2.049
t8 ← Interactive Leadership and Social Capital	0.541	0.049	11.022	0.000	1.217
z1 ← Managerial and Strategic Competencies	0.776	0.023	33.551	0.000	1.769
z2 ← Managerial and Strategic Competencies	0.589	0.047	12.405	0.000	1.321
z3 ← Managerial and Strategic Competencies	0.719	0.029	24.916	0.000	1.634
z4 ← Managerial and Strategic Competencies	0.789	0.023	35.046	0.000	1.978
z5 ← Managerial and Strategic Competencies	0.721	0.029	25.015	0.000	1.725
z6 ← Managerial and Strategic Competencies	0.723	0.029	24.641	0.000	1.618
z7 ← Managerial and Strategic Competencies	0.675	0.035	19.486	0.000	1.432

The results of the measurement item validity test showed that all factor loadings were significant, as all t-values were greater than the critical value of 1.96 and all p-values were below 0.001. The factor loadings were also acceptable, with most items showing moderate to strong relationships with their corresponding latent variables. Moreover, the VIF values were within the acceptable range, indicating that multicollinearity was not a serious concern in the measurement model. Therefore, the validity of the observed items in measuring their respective constructs was confirmed.

Table 5

Validity of Model Dimensions

Structural Path	Path Coefficient	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Leadership in the New Generation → Digital Transformation and Data-Driven Governance	0.788	0.021	37.094	0.000
Leadership in the New Generation → Institutional Governance and Leadership Legitimacy	0.893	0.009	95.520	0.000
Leadership in the New Generation → Interactive Leadership and Social Capital	0.829	0.020	42.345	0.000
Leadership in the New Generation → Managerial and Strategic Competencies	0.811	0.019	42.575	0.000
Leadership in the New Generation → Generation-Oriented Human Capital Management and Development	0.783	0.021	36.443	0.000
Leadership in the New Generation → Individual and Ethical Characteristics of the Leader	0.643	0.032	20.223	0.000

The findings showed that the higher-order construct of leadership in the new generation had a positive and significant effect on all six dimensions of the model. The strongest relationship was observed between leadership in the new generation and institutional governance and leadership legitimacy, with a path coefficient of 0.893. This indicates that legitimacy, institutional accountability, and governance mechanisms are central components of leadership fit for the new generation. Interactive leadership and social capital also had a strong coefficient of 0.829, followed by managerial and strategic competencies with a coefficient of 0.811. Digital transformation and data-driven governance, generation-oriented human capital management and development, and individual and ethical characteristics of the leader also had significant coefficients of 0.788, 0.783, and 0.643, respectively. These results confirm that the proposed leadership model is multidimensional and that all identified dimensions contribute significantly to explaining leadership based on the characteristics and expectations of the new generation.

Table 6

Coefficient of Determination

Variable	R^2
Digital Transformation and Data-Driven Governance	0.621
Institutional Governance and Leadership Legitimacy	0.797
Interactive Leadership and Social Capital	0.688
Managerial and Strategic Competencies	0.657
Generation-Oriented Human Capital Management and Development	0.613
Individual and Ethical Characteristics of the Leader	0.414

The coefficient of determination values indicated that the model had a satisfactory explanatory power. The highest R^2 value was related to institutional governance and leadership legitimacy, where 79.7% of the variance was explained by leadership in the new generation. The model also explained 68.8% of the variance in interactive leadership and social capital, 65.7% of the variance in managerial and strategic competencies, 62.1% of the variance in digital transformation and data-driven governance, 61.3% of the variance in generation-oriented human capital management and development, and 41.4% of the variance in individual and ethical characteristics of the leader. Since all R^2 values were above the weak threshold, the structural model demonstrated acceptable to strong explanatory capacity.

Table 7

Stone-Geisser Predictive Relevance Index

Variable	Q^2
Digital Transformation and Data-Driven Governance	0.335
Institutional Governance and Leadership Legitimacy	0.318
Interactive Leadership and Social Capital	0.307
Managerial and Strategic Competencies	0.330
Generation-Oriented Human Capital Management and Development	0.241
Individual and Ethical Characteristics of the Leader	0.220

The Stone-Geisser Q^2 values showed that the model had acceptable predictive relevance for all endogenous constructs. All Q^2 values were above 0.15, indicating that the model had at least moderate predictive power. The strongest predictive relevance was observed for digital transformation and data-driven governance, with a Q^2 value of 0.335, followed by managerial and strategic competencies with 0.330 and institutional governance and leadership legitimacy with 0.318. These findings indicate that the proposed model is not only explanatory but also has a satisfactory level of predictive capability.

Table 8

Overall Model Fit

Variable	R^2	Communality
Digital Transformation and Data-Driven Governance	0.621	0.335
Institutional Governance and Leadership Legitimacy	0.797	0.318
Interactive Leadership and Social Capital	0.688	0.307
Managerial and Strategic Competencies	0.657	0.330
Generation-Oriented Human Capital Management and Development	0.613	0.241
Individual and Ethical Characteristics of the Leader	0.414	0.220
Mean	0.631	0.291
GOF	0.428	—

The overall goodness-of-fit index was 0.428, which indicates a strong and desirable overall fit for the model. Since this value is higher than the recommended threshold for strong model fit, the findings confirm that the proposed leadership model has acceptable quality in explaining and predicting the dimensions of leadership based on the characteristics and expectations of the new generation. Therefore, the overall structural and measurement quality of the model was supported.

Table 9

Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Digital Transformation and Data-Driven Governance	0.834	0.879	0.549
Institutional Governance and Leadership Legitimacy	0.712	0.807	0.513
Interactive Leadership and Social Capital	0.819	0.866	0.557
Managerial and Strategic Competencies	0.839	0.879	0.512
Generation-Oriented Human Capital Management and Development	0.746	0.821	0.601
Individual and Ethical Characteristics of the Leader	0.880	0.905	0.544

The reliability and convergent validity results showed that all constructs had acceptable psychometric quality. Cronbach's alpha values were above 0.70 for all variables, confirming internal consistency reliability. Composite reliability values were also higher than 0.80, indicating strong construct reliability. In addition, all AVE values were above 0.40, confirming the convergent validity of the constructs. Therefore, the measurement model had acceptable reliability and validity, and the constructs were suitable for testing the structural model.

Figure 1

t-values for the Relationships between the Research Variables in the Structural Model

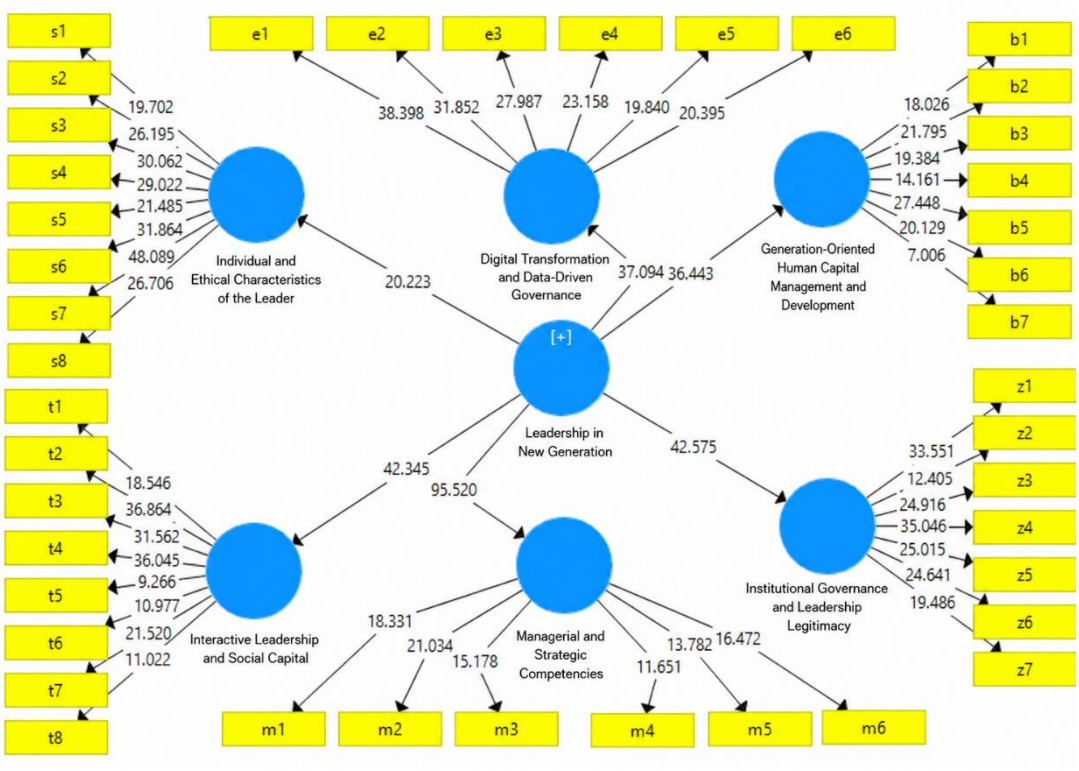

Figure 2

Standardized Coefficients for the Research Variables in the Structural Model

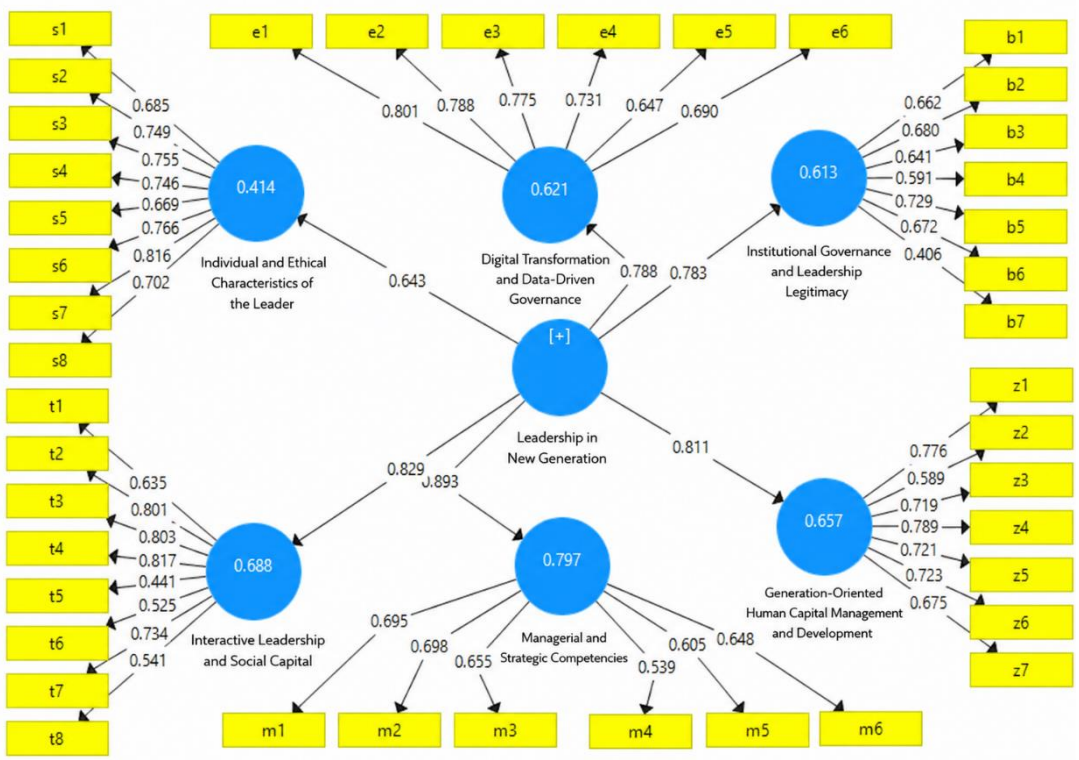

Figure 1 presents the t-values of the relationships between the variables in the structural model. The results showed that all t-values were greater than the critical value of 1.96 at the 0.05 significance level. Therefore, all paths and indicators in the model were statistically significant, and the validity of the structural relationships among the dimensions of leadership in the new generation was confirmed.

Figure 2 presents the standardized coefficients of the relationships between the variables in the structural model. The standardized coefficients showed that leadership in the new generation had positive and meaningful relationships with all six dimensions of the model. Among these dimensions, institutional governance and leadership legitimacy had the strongest standardized coefficient, while individual and ethical characteristics of the leader had the lowest coefficient. However, all coefficients were statistically acceptable and supported the overall fit of the proposed model.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to explain the fit of a leadership model based on the characteristics and expectations of the new generation among headquarters employees of the Iranian National Tax Administration. The findings confirmed that the proposed model possesses satisfactory measurement and structural validity and that all six identified dimensions significantly contribute to the conceptualization of leadership in the context of the new generation. The results demonstrated that leadership in the new generation exerts significant positive effects on institutional governance and leadership legitimacy, interactive leadership and social capital, managerial and strategic competencies, digital transformation and data-driven governance, generation-oriented human capital management and development, and individual and ethical characteristics of the leader. Moreover, the values obtained for factor loadings, reliability coefficients, convergent validity indicators, predictive relevance indices, and overall model fit confirmed the adequacy of the proposed framework. These findings suggest that effective leadership for the new generation is not limited to personal traits or managerial authority but is instead a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing ethical, relational, technological, developmental, strategic, and institutional dimensions.

One of the most important findings of the study was that institutional governance and leadership legitimacy emerged as the strongest dimension associated with leadership in the new generation. This finding indicates that younger employees increasingly evaluate leadership not merely based on authority or positional power but through perceptions of fairness, transparency, accountability, and institutional credibility. The result is consistent with studies suggesting that younger generations are highly sensitive to organizational legitimacy, ethical consistency, and principled leadership behavior [20, 21]. Generation Z employees tend to seek organizations and leaders whose actions align with broader social values and whose decisions are perceived as transparent and fair. Similarly, research on intergenerational leadership emphasizes that legitimacy and trust are critical components of leadership effectiveness in environments characterized by diversity and rapid technological change [4]. The prominence of institutional legitimacy in the present study may also reflect the specific context of public sector organizations, where employees expect leaders to act within clear governance frameworks while simultaneously demonstrating responsiveness and accountability. This finding suggests that leadership fit for the new generation requires institutional trustworthiness in addition to interpersonal effectiveness.

The second strongest dimension identified in the study was interactive leadership and social capital. This result highlights the importance of communication, collaboration, trust-building, and participation in contemporary leadership. Younger

employees increasingly prefer leadership styles that encourage dialogue, mutual respect, and involvement in organizational processes. This finding is aligned with research demonstrating that younger generations place a high value on participatory relationships and expect leaders to facilitate communication rather than simply direct behavior [23, 25]. Studies on social participation and knowledge sharing have also shown that collaborative environments strengthen engagement and organizational commitment among younger cohorts [24]. Furthermore, research on effective leadership for Generation Z indicates that relational leadership styles are more likely to foster motivation, commitment, and trust than traditional command-and-control approaches [34]. Therefore, the significant role of interactive leadership and social capital found in this study supports the argument that leadership effectiveness increasingly depends on the quality of interpersonal relationships and the ability to build organizational networks of trust and cooperation.

Managerial and strategic competencies also demonstrated a strong relationship with leadership in the new generation. This finding indicates that while younger employees value participation and support, they also expect leaders to possess competence, vision, and strategic decision-making abilities. The result is consistent with contemporary leadership literature emphasizing that effective leaders must balance relational skills with strategic capability and innovation management [26]. Similarly, leadership competency research has argued that emerging organizational environments require leaders who can manage complexity, uncertainty, and rapid change while maintaining organizational performance [27]. The findings suggest that new-generation employees do not reject authority itself; rather, they expect authority to be justified through expertise, strategic thinking, and demonstrated competence. Consequently, leadership fit is enhanced when leaders combine human-centered approaches with clear strategic direction and effective decision-making.

Another significant finding was the strong influence of digital transformation and data-driven governance within the leadership model. This result reflects the reality that Generation Z has been shaped by digital technologies and therefore expects organizations and leaders to be technologically competent, transparent, and adaptive. Previous studies have shown that digital workplaces play a critical role in employee engagement and organizational effectiveness [13]. Similarly, research on digital multigenerational organizations has highlighted the growing importance of technology-enabled leadership for unlocking human capital and supporting collaboration [12]. The significance of digital transformation in the present study also supports findings suggesting that younger employees expect leadership to facilitate innovation, access to information, and technology-supported communication [19]. In this regard, digital competence becomes not merely a technical skill but a leadership capability that influences organizational credibility, responsiveness, and employee satisfaction.

The findings further demonstrated that generation-oriented human capital management and development constitute an essential component of leadership fit. This result indicates that younger employees expect leaders to invest in learning opportunities, career development, talent recognition, and individualized support. Research on talent management and employer branding has consistently shown that Generation Z employees place considerable emphasis on professional growth and organizational support [8]. Likewise, studies examining job engagement among Generation Z have found that developmental opportunities significantly influence organizational commitment and retention [9]. Research on employee retention further confirms that younger employees are more likely to remain committed to organizations when they perceive opportunities for learning, advancement, and meaningful contribution [14, 15]. Therefore, the strong role of generation-oriented human capital management identified in this study suggests that leadership effectiveness increasingly depends on the ability to nurture talent and create supportive developmental environments.

The dimension of individual and ethical characteristics of the leader, although exhibiting the lowest coefficient among the six dimensions, remained statistically significant and substantively important. This finding suggests that ethical behavior, honesty, integrity, and responsibility continue to be essential leadership attributes. However, younger employees appear to evaluate these characteristics within a broader institutional and organizational framework rather than as isolated personal virtues. This interpretation is supported by studies demonstrating that Generation Z places substantial importance on moral reasoning, authenticity, and ethical consistency [20]. Research on corporate social responsibility and work motivation similarly indicates that younger generations are motivated by leaders who demonstrate ethical commitment and social responsibility [21]. Furthermore, studies on sustainability-oriented attitudes among younger cohorts suggest that ethical leadership is increasingly linked to perceptions of organizational legitimacy and societal contribution [22, 31]. Consequently, while personal ethics remain important, they are most effective when integrated with institutional legitimacy, transparency, and organizational responsibility.

The overall explanatory and predictive power of the model further strengthens the theoretical implications of the findings. The relatively high R^2 values indicate that leadership in the new generation successfully explains a substantial proportion of variance across all six dimensions. Similarly, the Q^2 values confirmed the predictive relevance of the model, while the GOF value demonstrated strong overall model fit. These results support the multidimensional conceptualization of leadership and suggest that leadership effectiveness among younger employees cannot be adequately understood through single-factor explanations. Instead, leadership must be viewed as an integrated system in which institutional governance, social relationships, strategic competencies, technological adaptability, talent development, and ethical behavior interact to create a leadership framework aligned with contemporary workforce expectations.

The findings also contribute to the broader literature on generational differences in organizations. While some scholars have questioned the magnitude of generational differences, arguing that age-related changes may be overstated [5], the present findings indicate that specific leadership expectations do emerge among younger employees and that these expectations can be systematically identified and measured. The results are also consistent with studies documenting generational shifts in work values, organizational engagement, leadership preferences, and career expectations [1, 2, 10]. At the same time, the findings support arguments suggesting that leadership models must move beyond generational stereotypes and instead focus on empirically validated dimensions that reflect contemporary organizational realities [28]. The multidimensional model proposed in this study represents such an effort by integrating personal, relational, developmental, technological, strategic, and institutional dimensions into a unified framework.

The findings are also consistent with research on workforce transformation and employee retention. Studies examining changing workforce dynamics have emphasized that organizations must adapt leadership practices to evolving employee expectations in order to maintain productivity and engagement [18]. Similarly, turnover research indicates that younger employees often evaluate organizations based on leadership quality, developmental opportunities, and organizational support [17, 32]. The dimensions identified in the present study correspond closely with these factors, suggesting that leadership fit may play a central role in retaining talented employees and enhancing organizational performance. Furthermore, findings related to empowerment and leadership differentiation indicate that fairness and inclusiveness are critical considerations when implementing modern leadership approaches [29]. Thus, leadership fit involves not only adopting innovative practices but also ensuring that such practices are perceived as equitable and legitimate.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that leadership in the era of the new generation requires a comprehensive and integrated approach. Effective leaders must simultaneously embody ethical values, develop social capital, support employee growth, demonstrate strategic competence, embrace digital transformation, and establish institutional legitimacy. These dimensions collectively represent the leadership expectations of younger employees and provide a foundation for designing leadership development initiatives capable of responding to contemporary organizational challenges. The study therefore contributes to both theory and practice by offering an empirically validated framework for understanding leadership fit in organizations increasingly shaped by generational change.

Despite its contributions, the present study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted within a single public-sector organization, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other governmental agencies, private-sector organizations, or international contexts. Second, the study employed a cross-sectional design; therefore, causal inferences and changes in leadership expectations over time could not be examined. Third, the data were collected through self-report questionnaires, which may be affected by social desirability bias and common method variance. Finally, although the study focused on employees representing the new generation, the research did not directly compare different generational cohorts, making it difficult to determine whether the identified dimensions are unique to younger employees or shared across age groups.

Future studies should examine the proposed leadership model in different organizational contexts, including private companies, nonprofit organizations, and international institutions. Comparative studies involving Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z employees could provide a deeper understanding of similarities and differences in leadership expectations across cohorts. Longitudinal research designs are also recommended to investigate how leadership preferences evolve over time and in response to organizational or technological change. Additionally, future research may explore the moderating effects of organizational culture, digital maturity, job type, and employment status on the relationships identified in the present model. Qualitative and mixed-method studies could also provide richer insights into how employees interpret leadership legitimacy, digital leadership, and developmental support.

Organizations seeking to attract, engage, and retain younger employees should redesign leadership development programs around the dimensions identified in this study. Leadership training should emphasize communication, participation, trust-building, and collaborative problem-solving. Public organizations should strengthen institutional transparency, accountability, and governance mechanisms to enhance leadership legitimacy. Managers should be encouraged to adopt technology-enabled leadership practices that support digital communication, data-driven decision-making, and organizational innovation. Human resource systems should prioritize continuous learning, career development, mentoring, and individualized support for employees. Finally, organizational leaders should integrate ethical behavior, strategic competence, and developmental orientation into their daily leadership practices to create environments that align with the expectations and values of the new generation workforce.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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