

# **COMMUNICATION BARRIERS AND LEADERSHIP STYLES LEADING CABIN CREW MILLENNIALS IN MULTICULTURAL AIRLINES**

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**PACDEFF 2023**



# IMPORTANT DETAILS

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THIS STUDY WAS CONDUCTED  
BEGINNING OF 2020, JUST BEFORE  
COVID-19



THE PARTICIPANTS WERE ACTIVE  
CABIN CREW MEMBERS WORKING  
IN 3 MIDDLE EASTERN AIRLINES



MIDDLE EASTERN AIRLINES WORK  
WITH MORE THAN 100 DIFFERENT  
NATIONALITIES





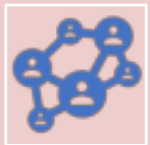
- Millennials are the new workforce carrying with them differences in values and styles of communication, which can create potential challenges for leaders of other generations in their flexibility and openness to this generation.
- ‘Multicultural teams often generate frustrating management dilemmas. Cultural differences can create substantial obstacles to effective team-work – but these may be subtle and difficult to recognize until significant damage has already been done.’ (Brett, Jeanne; Behfar, Kristin; Kern, 2016:17)



# **IS THERE A SPECIFIC LEADING STYLE PREFERENCE THAT LEADERS NEED TO ADOPT AND POTENTIAL COMMUNICATION BARRIERS TO CONSIDER WHILE IN A MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT LEADING MILLENNIALS?**



Is there a different preferred leading style according to one's position/rank?



Are there specific communication barriers in a multicultural environment that can potentially impact the team and consequently performance?



- Survey & Interview

- Posted in 3 Middle Eastern Airline Facebook groups
- Survey Ran for 15 days
- One crew from each rank that allowed to be contacted for interview was selected



Quantitative instrument



Qualitative instrument

# RESEARCH DESIGN





Survey

1. Personal questions
2. Cultural dimensions questions
3. Communication styles and barriers questions
4. Performance - Leadership Styles



**Semi-structured** Interview

Interviewees that agreed to participate in the study:

- EC- Serbia, 28 years old, 2 years of experience
- PC- Egypt, 34 years old, 4,5 years of experience
- S - South Korea, 35 years old, 6 years of experience
- P- India, 38 years old, 10,5 years of experience

# RESEARCH DESIGN



# RESEARCH DESIGN



## Sample

- 131 valid answers from active crew members
- 32 different nationalities
- 19% Pursers
- 21% Supervisor's
- 42% Premium crew
- 43% Economy crew

- EMIRATES 32 %
- QATAR 44%
- ETIHAD 24 %

	P	S	PC	EC	Total	%	
Angola			1		1	1%	
Argentina			1		1	1%	
Belgium			1		1	1%	
Bosnia			1		1	1%	
Brazil			2	1	3	2%	
China		1	1		2	2%	
Colombia			1		1	1%	
Egypt	3		1	2	6	5%	
El Salvador			1		1	1%	
England			1		1	1%	
France	1				1	1%	
Germany				1	1	1%	
Hong Kong				1	1	1%	
India	4	5	7	5	21	16%	
Japan				1	1	1%	
Kenya			2	1	3	2%	
Macedonia	1	1	1		3	2%	
Malaysia	1			4	5	4%	
Morocco			1		1	1%	
Mozambique			1		1	1%	
Philippines	6	1	3	5	15	11%	
Poland				1	1	1%	
Portugal	1	3	1	2	7	5%	
Romania	1		2	9	12	9%	
Russia				1	1	1%	
Serbia	3	1	5	2	11	8%	
Singapore			1		1	1%	
South Africa	1		1	2	4	3%	
South Korea			2	3	2	7	5%
Thailand	3	5	2	2	12	9%	
Tunisia			1	1	1	3	2%
Turkey			1		1	1%	
Total	25	2	1	42	43	131	

19% 32% 33%

Table 1. Survey answers by position and nationality



# RESULTS



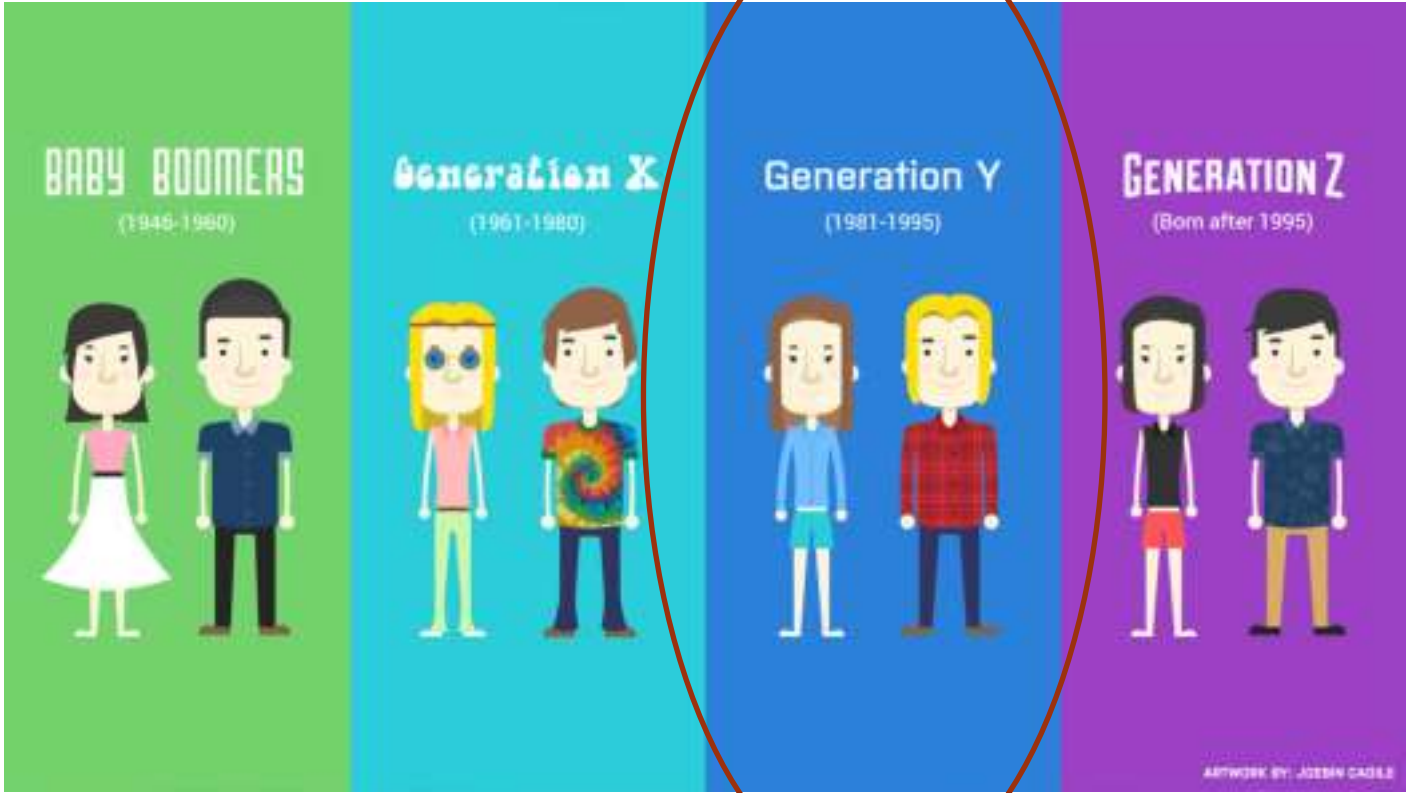
## Personal Questions

	Millennial's				GEN. Xers	
	20-29 Y/O	%	30-39 Y/O	%	> 51 Y/O	%
<b>Total Crew</b>	56	42.75	72	54.96	3	2.29
EC/ PC	56	42.75	29	34.12	0	0.00
<b>Sup. / Purser</b>	0	0.00	43	93.48	3	6.52

1-3 Years		4-7 Years		8-10 Years		> 11 Years	
	%		%		%		%
43	32.82	37	28.24	30	22.90	21	16.03
43	50.59	33	38.82	5	5.88	4	4.71
0	0.00	4	8.70	25	54.35	17	36.96

*Total number of years in aviation by rank and equivalent % of answers to the survey*







# WHAT IS CULTURE?



- Culture can be defined many ways but it's easy to understand that culture is something quite natural. As Edgar Schein (Schein, 2017:5) says, cultures covers pretty much everything a group has learned as it has evolved.
- 'This accumulated learning is a pattern or system of beliefs, values, and behavioural norms that come to be taken for granted as basic assumptions and eventually drop out awareness.' (Schein, 2017:6)



# CULTURAL DIMENSIONS – HOFSTEDE'S



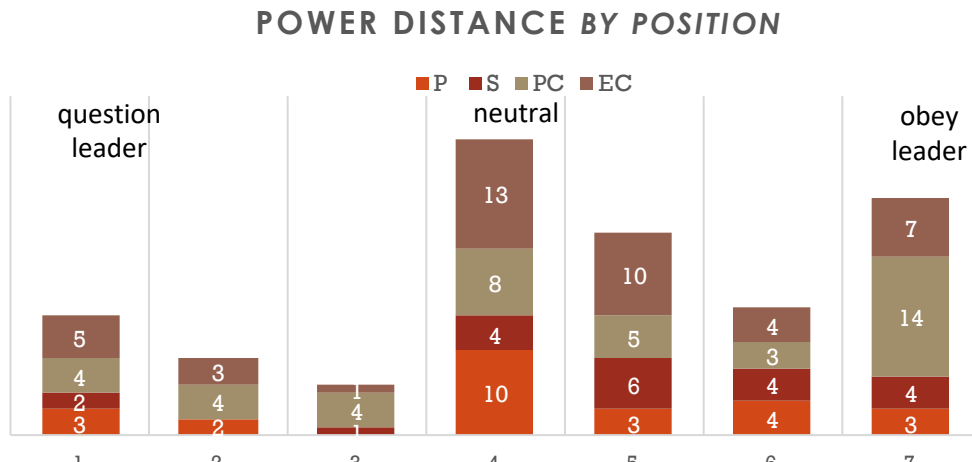
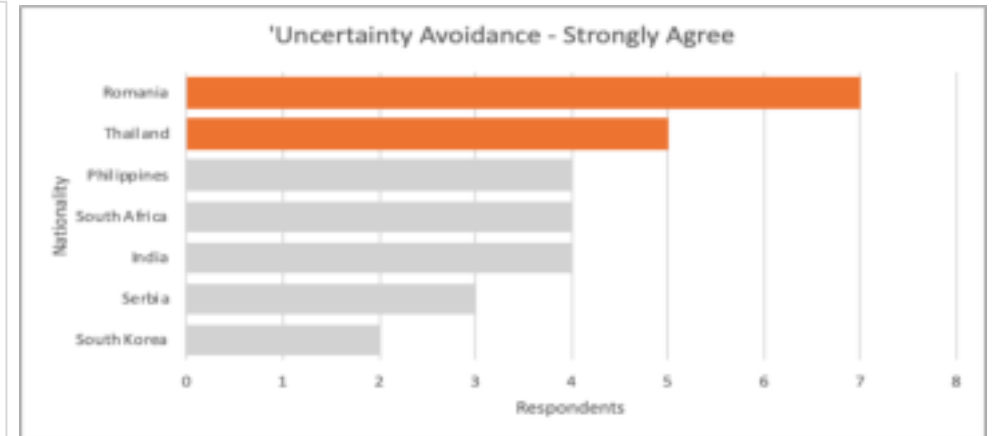
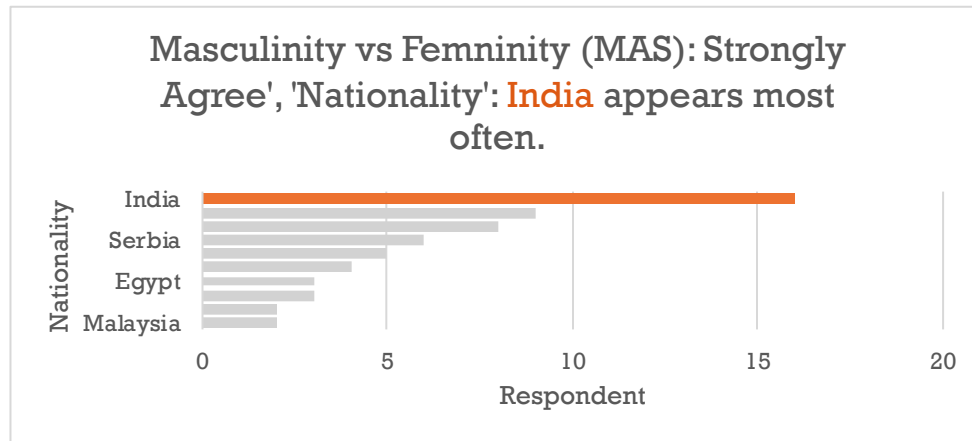
*Figure Adapted: Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory*



# RESULTS



## Cultural Dimensions

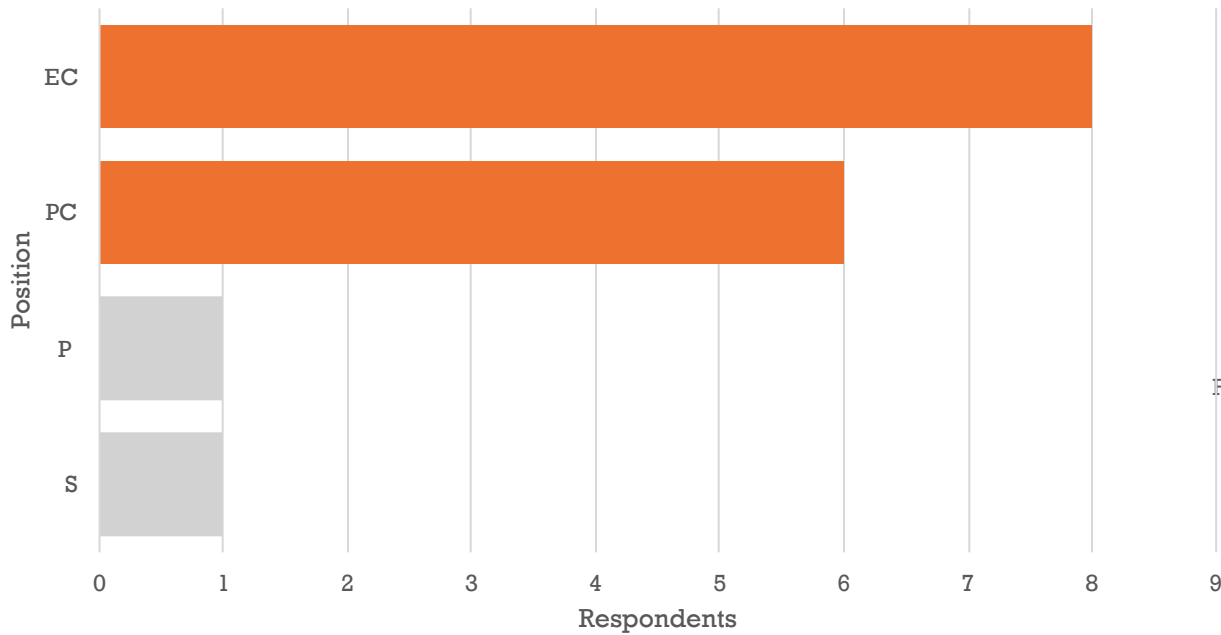


# RESULTS

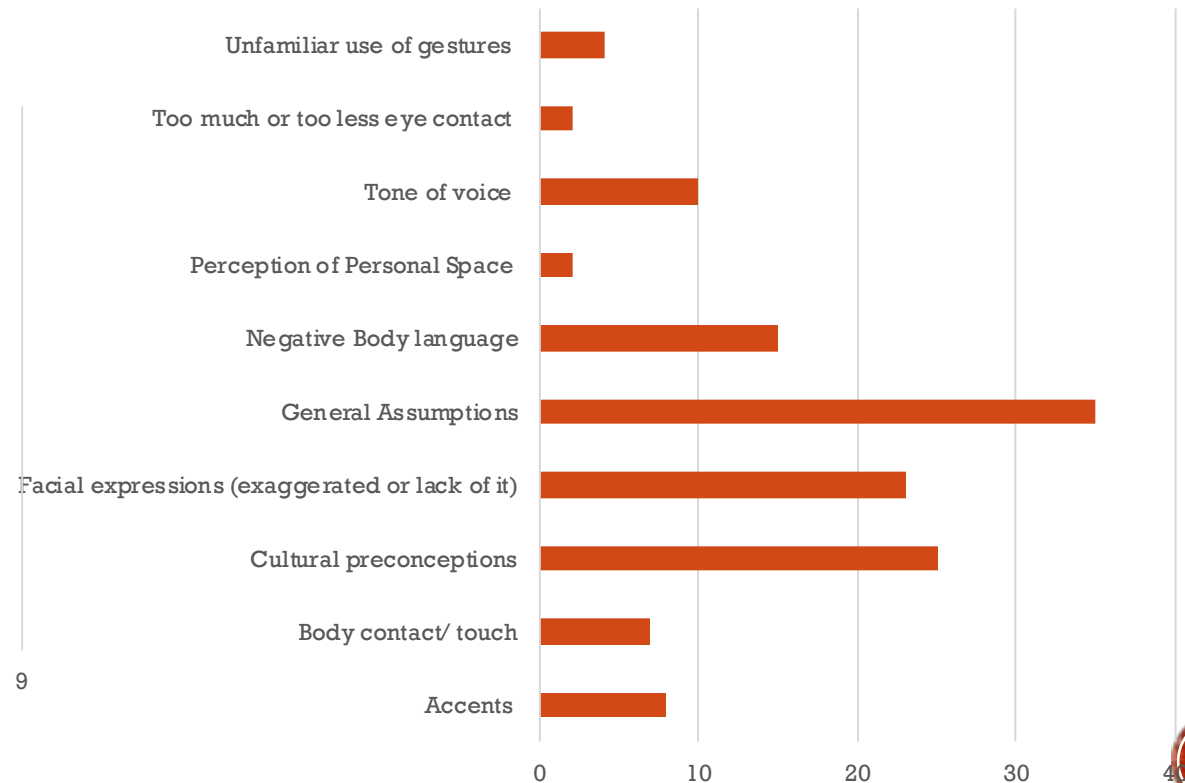


## Cultural Dimensions

For 'Communication Issue: Cultural preconceptions',  
'Position': **EC** and **PC** appear most often.



## Communication Barriers

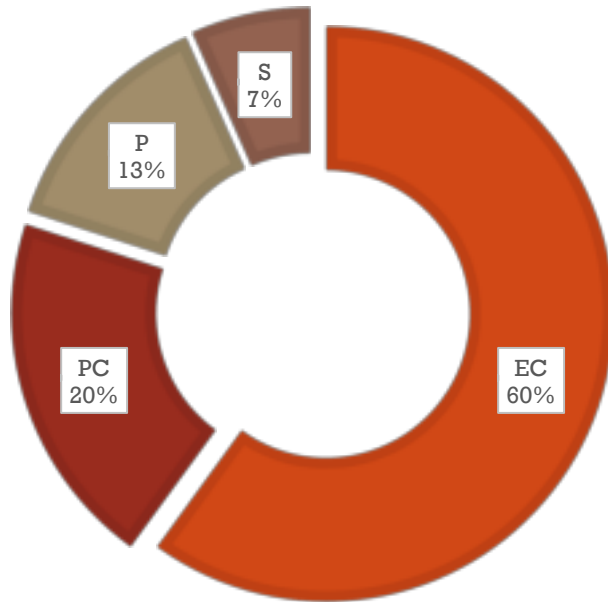




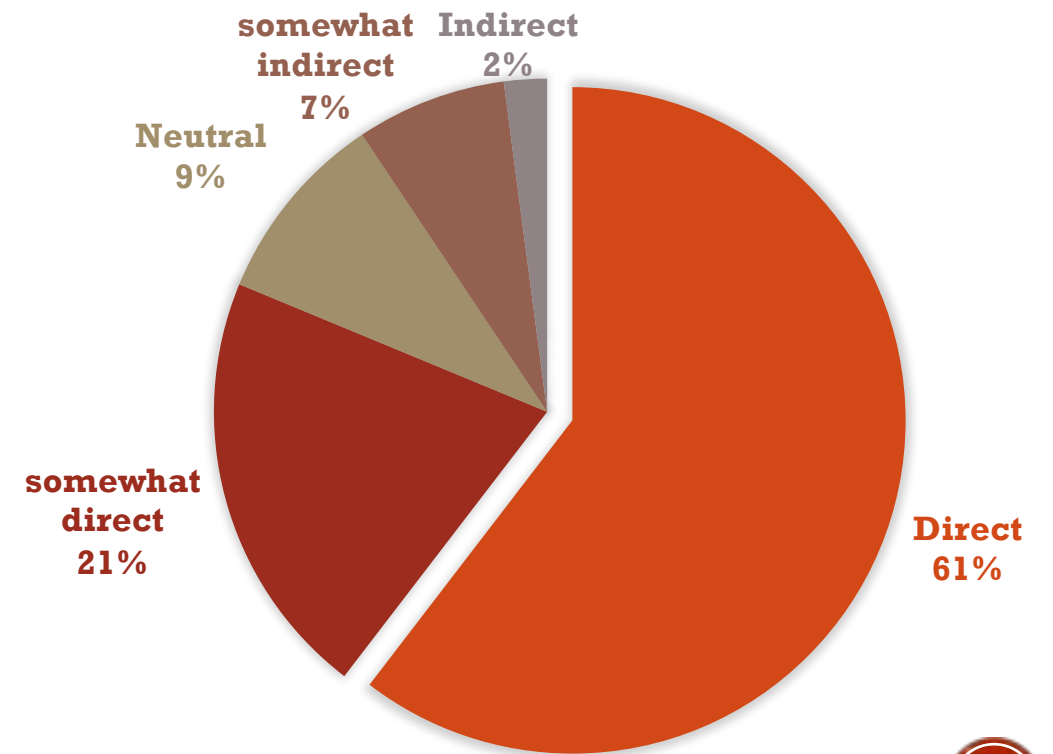
## Cultural Dimensions

# RESULTS

FOR 'ACCENTS AND FLUENCY: SOMEWHAT DIFFICULT',



'DIRECT' vs INDIRECT COMMUNICATION





## Cultural Dimensions

# RESULTS

- A Supervisor crew said:
  - “I am using English language with my colleagues while I am on duty, and it’s not my first language, it is Korean, so I am facing misunderstanding sometimes as I struggle to understand accents and some words. Apart from that I got used to understand things that before were new to me, like very expressive body language, that I realized its very much cultural and it’s not rude or aggressive as I though on my first experiences and then I realized why in training they always say, “don’t be too sensitive with others attitudes or behaviors”.







# GENERATIONS AND LEADERS

WORKFORCE GENERATION	PREFER TO WORK FOR MANAGERS WHO	MANAGERS WHO DRIVE THEM CRAZY
BABY BOOMERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are consensual and treat as equals</li> <li>• Take a democratic approach</li> <li>• Work with the group to define a mission</li> <li>• Show warmth and caring</li> <li>• Assure them they are making a difference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aren't open to input</li> <li>• Send a "may-way-or-the-highway" message</li> <li>• Brusque</li> <li>• Don't show interest</li> <li>• Practice one-upmanship</li> </ul>
GENERATION XERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competent, direct and straightforward</li> <li>• Genuine</li> <li>• Comfortable giving them a deadline and turning them look to meet it</li> <li>• Informal</li> <li>• Supportive of training and growth opportunities</li> <li>• Flexible</li> <li>• Results-oriented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Micromanage</li> <li>• Don't walk and talk</li> <li>• Spend too much time on process and too little on results</li> <li>• Flashy</li> <li>• Schmooze</li> </ul>
MILLENNIALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational and know their personal goals</li> <li>• Positive</li> <li>• Comfortable coaching and supporting them</li> <li>• Collaborative</li> <li>• Organized and create a reasonable structure</li> <li>• Achievement oriented</li> <li>• Motivational</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cynical and sarcastic</li> <li>• Treat them as if they are too young to be valuable</li> <li>• Threatened by their technical savvy</li> <li>• Condescending</li> <li>• Inconsistent and disorganized</li> </ul>

Figure Adapted: Cima, Laura E; Cahill, 2016 - Workforce Generations preferences



# LEADERSHIP STYLE

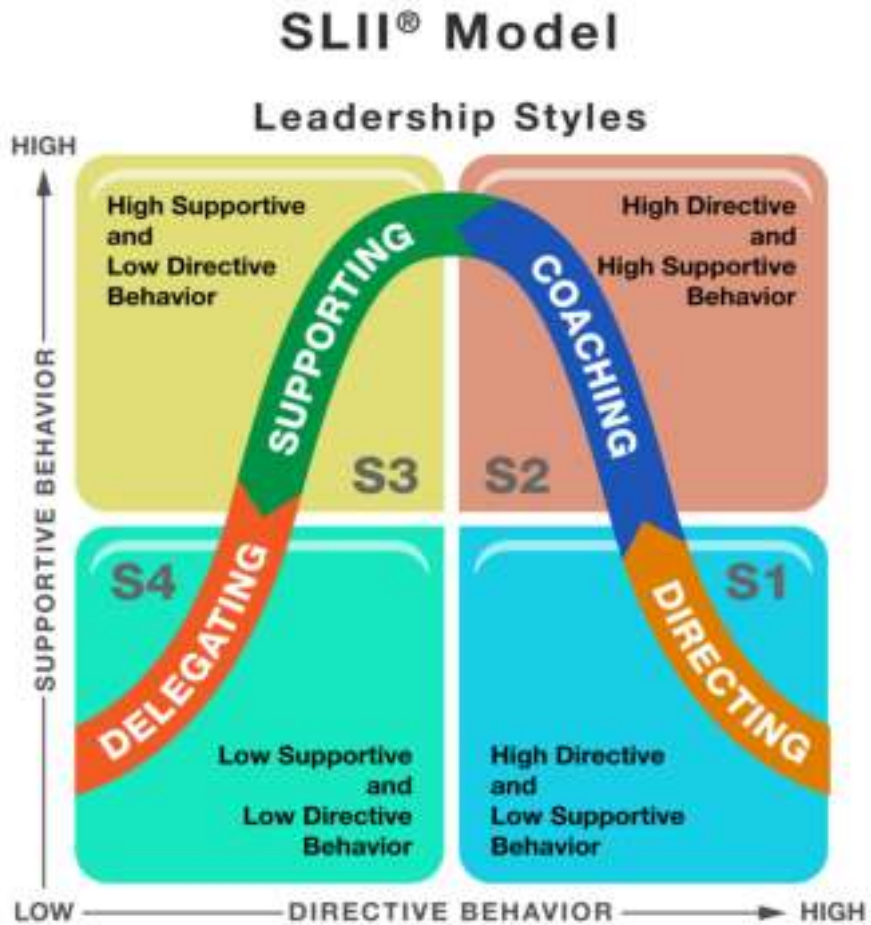


Figure Adapted Situational Leadership -Source: Blanchard 1993

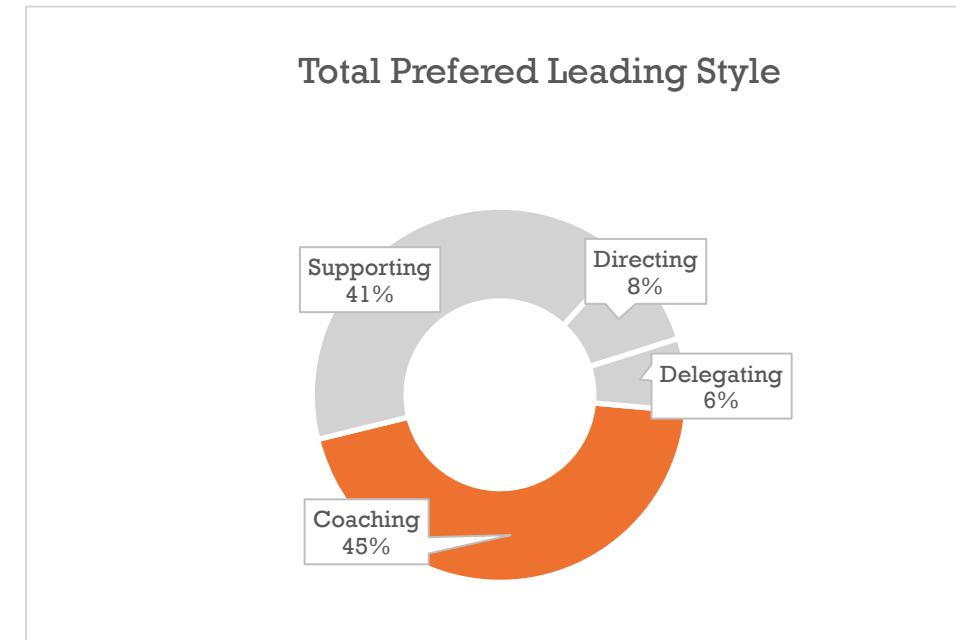


# RESULTS



Observed frequency for the preferred Leadership styles in relation to the group age.

	40 to 50 years	30 to 39 years	20 to 29 years	value-p <sup>1</sup>
Coaching	2	39 (+)	16 (-)	0,0116*
Delegating	0	9	3	
Directing	0	4	6	
Supporting	1	20 (-)	31 (+)	

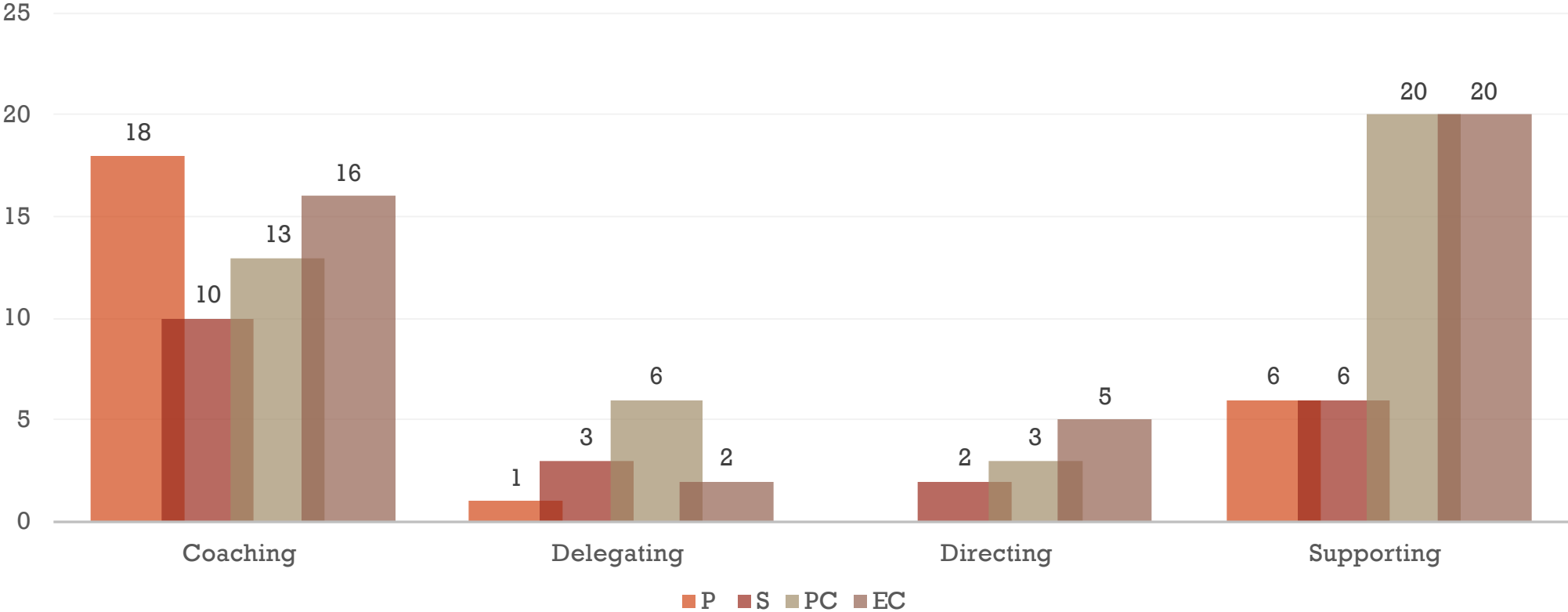


# RESULTS



## LEADERSHIP

Preferred Leading Style by Position



# RESULTS



## LEADERSHIP

- Purser (38 years old) mentioned “When I use coaching with help of supporting and directive it goes very well, and the crew feels engaged, motivated and supported. But if I need to give feedback when using support and have to use a more directive style some crew take it the wrong way and their reaction is poor as they take time for them to understand that I am still supporting them. ”
- Economy crew 28 years old said “Personally, support with some direction to know exactly what they want. Support in the sense that if I have to deal with situations and issues, I have the help and support of my leaders but also with some direction as I like them to tell me exactly how to deal and do things, so I do it from the beginning.”



**IS THERE A SPECIFIC  
LEADING STYLE  
PREFERENCE THAT  
LEADERS NEED TO  
ADOPT AND  
POTENTIAL  
COMMUNICATION  
BARRIERS TO  
CONSIDER WHILE IN A  
MULTICULTURAL  
ENVIRONMENT  
LEADING  
MILLENNIALS?**

- The result of the study with 131 respondents and 4 interviews, suggests that in the Millennials generation, leaders and team members tend to prefer, and according to Blanchard (1993) and Northouse (2016) approach to Situational leadership style and sufficient evidence shows that all positions tend to prefer a **coaching or supportive leadership styles with a situational use of directive and delegating.**





## **IS THERE A DIFFERENT PREFERRED LEADING STYLE ACCORDING TO ONE'S POSITION/RANK?**

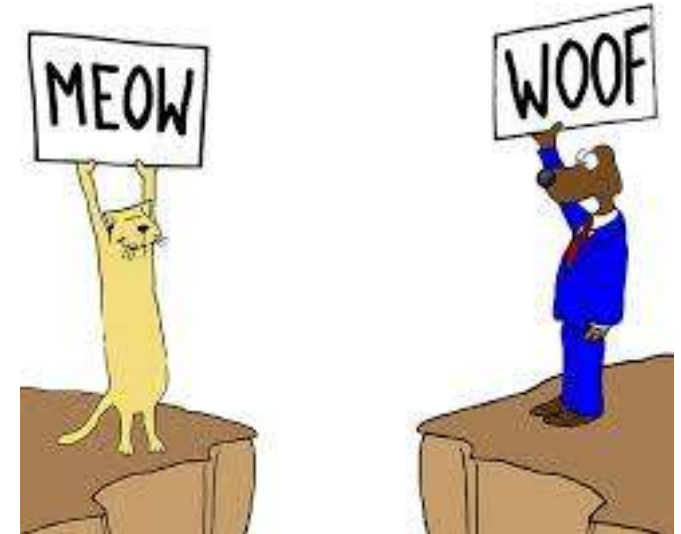
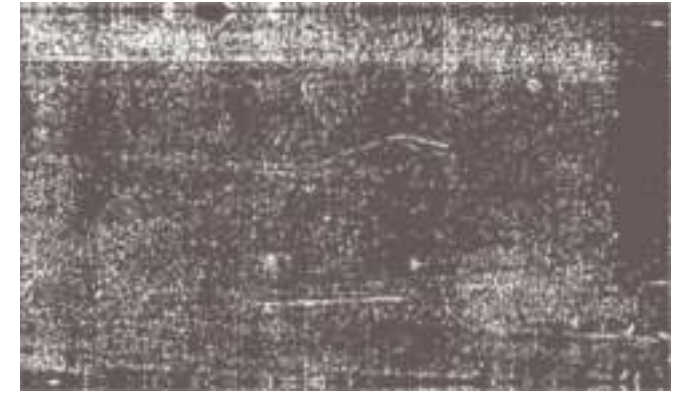
- 1 -According to the results obtained, no direct correlation was found with position/rank, nor nationality as both tend to prefer a supportive and coaching leadership style with the least preferred styles being delegate and direct.





## ARE THERE SPECIFIC COMMUNICATION BARRIERS IN A MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT THAT CAN POTENTIALLY IMPACT THE TEAM AND CONSEQUENTLY PERFORMANCE?

- The study suggest that teams and leaders face communication barriers such as accents, words, body language, assumptions and others.
- The findings suggest that over time the type of communication barriers can change, as observed in the analysis the crew in lower rank and younger face a bigger challenge with accents and words while crew in higher ranks and older will have more difficulties with body language.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

- Cultural awareness programs for new joiners and refresh courses for crew
- Training emphasis for leaders on board to ensure proper coaching and support techniques are used with crew
- Develop tools such as support material available to crew in particular junior one such as small booklets, guidance tables and other to assist in their work





# LIMITATIONS

- Limited sample of 131 respondents and 4 respondents to the interviews.
- The culture questionnaire presented limited results, and further research would be required.
- The questions entailed their perception, or their personal opinion based on their thought on how they should be behaving and not necessarily on how they truly feel.
- Bias towards the interviewer and when the respondents may give answers that they believe will please the interviewer rather than the truthful responses.

**THANK YOU!**