Generation Z Employees as Future Leaders?

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Abstract
In today's workplace, traditional criteria no longer define a successful leadership style, as it requires a mixture of soft and professional skills, experience, and education (Duquesnoy, 2011; Davenport & Prusak,1998). Megatrends are forcing younger generational cohorts to pivot and adjust to massive disruptions and paradigm shifts. In the process, their perceptions of leadership are also under scrutiny. For example, How will Generation Z lead? What qualities and characteristics does this generation associate with effective Leadership? Furthermore, what leadership styles will motivate and retain Generation Z employees? (Aquas, 2019). When one translates Generation Z skills into leadership styles, there is a disconnect, as it appears that Generation Z employees lack social, and business skills and, often the lack of motivation to lead a team or an organization (Freedman, 2023; Sinek, 2022). In addition, Generation Z is non-committal to traditional or known leadership styles, even though they value influential,results-driven, service-minded, authentic leadership and "lead by example" (Blumenfeld, 2019; Cullimore,2020; Jain, 2021). This paper investigates how Generation Z employees are preparing to lead themselves, teams, and organizations in the future
Keywords: generation Z; leadership style; generation Z leadership development.

Introduction
Leadership is the capacity of a person must influence the behavior of others toward a goal and to do things they would not otherwise have the skills or motivation to achieve. Being in a position of power and influence does not automatically make you a leader (Dabi, 2020). As the global business environment has become more unpredictable and complex, Leadership matters more today than ever. More than contextual factors such as economic conditions, industry factors, and a firm's overall health, leadership factors now have a much more predictive impact on company performance. Therefore, one of the most critical decisions a company can make is whom to appoint to positions of Leadership (Beck & Harter, 2023).

Successful leaders require more than unconventional behavior. They require mastery of oneself, the uncertainty of their environment, and the complexity of relationships with others, such as subordinates and employees (Post, 2022). Research into the leadership styles of Generation Z leaders reveals significant differences in generational characteristics, behaviors, culture, and ideas about leadership (Agustia & Pandin, 2021; Cullimore, 2020; Mawhinney, 2022). This paper investigates how Generation Z employees are preparing to lead themselves, teams, and organizations in the future.

Who is Generation Z?
Generation Z (Gen Z, Gen Zers) is the cohort succeeding Millennials and preceding.Generation Alpha. Researchers and popular media use the mid-to-late 1990s as starting birth years and the early 2010s as the ending birth years. Most members of Gen Z are children of Generation X (Dimock, 2019: Duffin, 2020).

As the first social generation to have grown up with access to the Internet and portable digital technology from a young age, members of Gen Z, even if not necessarily digitally literate, have been dubbed "digital natives" (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015). Members of Gen Z have been undeniably shaped by the Great Recession of 2007–09 and the COVID-19 pandemic. They grew up in the era of Smart devices, mass shootings, the MeToo movement, lower life expectancy and birth rates, and social entrepreneurships, have shaped the value system of the youngest generational participant in the workforce. Because of this, early names for Gen Z included "iGeneration" and "Homelanders" (Eldridge, 2023). In their early years, they witnessed watershed social hanges, such as the election of the first Black U.S. president (Barack Obama) and the equalization of same-sex marriage.

Gen Z is the most diverse generation of Americans in various demographics. Nearly 50 percent of Gen Zers are racial and ethnic minorities, and 1 in 4 identifies as Hispanic. They have grown up in more diverse settings than previous generations and have higher percentages of single-parent families, mixed-race families, and LGBTQ+ parents in legally recognized partnerships. In fact, sixteen percent of Gen Zers identify as part of the LGBTQ + community, more than any previous generation. They are also shifting and eschewing gender norms more than any previous generation, with more than half of Gen Zers saying that forms and profiles should allow for sex or gender options other than "man" and "woman" in legally recognized partnerships (Parker & Igielink, 2020).

Gen Zers are more likely to reside in cities and metropolitan areas, with only 13 percent growing up in rural areas, and are less likely to move than those of previous generations who were the same age. Research by Klein (2018) showed that the oldest members of Gen Z were delaying or perhaps even preceding marriage, with only four percent getting married between 18 and 21, nearly half as many as in the millennial generation, of which seven percent got married at a young age. This may be partly because more of them are going to college.

Gen Z's characteristics are exciting and specific. Compared to previous generations members of Gen Z tend to live more slowly than their predecessors when they are their age ("Meet Generation Z," 2015). Gen Z teenagers are more concerned than older generations with academic performance and job prospects (Poswolsky, 2022).and are better at delaying gratification than their counterparts from the 1960s (Carlson, 2018). Sexting among adolescents has grown in prevalence; the consequences of this remain poorly understood (Gesso, Klettke, Agustina & Montiel 2019).

According to Tari (2011), "Generation Z individuals exhibit narcissistic characteristics that prioritize their interests. These narcissistic traits are also apparent in their weak relationships with their families. Individuals of this generation, who care more about the opinions of their peers, are weak in terms of emotional intelligence " (p.212). To better understand Gen Zers, it is essential to understand the disruptors that have shaped their characteristics. These include:

- COVID-19 epidemic and growing COVID variants
- The Great Resignation
- Quite Quitting
- Economic Inflation
- Economic Recession

Eldridge (2023) noted that "members of Gen Z as more pragmatic and earlier to mature than those of previous generations, also they are more likely to graduate high school, more likely to go to college, and more cautious in their career choices" (para.6). They are more likely than any previous generation to have at least one parent who graduated college. They were found less likely to engage in underage drinking or ride in cars without a seat belt. This may be partly because of their being primarily raised by Gen X parents, who were concerned mainly with childhood safety (Eldridge, 2023).

Gen Z defines themselves differently, is intrigued by group trends, is passionate about issues their parents may not understand and is willing to research. Those differences may include the following.

- Fewer validation expectations
- More independent
- More entrepreneurial
- More communicative
- More competitive
- More motivated by security
- It was driven by career/financial goals

(7 Unique Characteristics of Generation Z, n.d.).

Additional characteristics may include.

- Shorter conversations and meetings ("eight-second" attention span).
- Loyal, thoughtful, compassionate, open-minded, and responsible.
- Use their phones for everyday activities.

- Visual and interested in using social media sites for their learning.
- They prefer to work in small groups so they can foster more creativity.
- Virtual gamers love game challenges.
- Have a reputation for frugality and caution.
- See the world as not a safe place.
- Prioritize diversity - across race, gender, and orientation.
- A health-conscious cohort that values their privacy.
- Embrace differences in sexual orientation, religion, or race.
- High levels of stress and anxiety due to geopolitical and economic instability

(Mawhinney, 2022; Staglin, 2022).

Gen Zers like maintaining a healthy balance between work and personal life. They value mental health and peace of mind (Twenge, 2016). Gen Z employees avoid stressful situations and desire to work in organizations that offer health benefits to their employees. Another important Gen Z characteristic is that they value authenticity. Being a big name in the industry and displaying big turnovers and sales is not a priority for Gen Z employees. They do not like an exaggeration. Authenticity and transparency are crucial to them at the orkplace. People often disregard Gen Zers as lazy and laid back due to their desire to achieve a good work-life balance (Generation Z Characteristics and Work Ethics in Workplace, 2021). However, this needs to be clarified. Gen Z employees focus on their careers and extremely hard working. Three things upset Gen Z workers:

1. Being asked to work when they do not want to
2. Denied the use of annual leaves on their perusal
3. Being asked to work on back-to-back shifts (Wikie, 2019).

Workplace Behavior and Impact on Organizations

A study by Mawhinney (2022) found that Gen Z prefers to work in industries that they interact within their personal lives as opposed to industries they are not frequent consumers of. They desire diverse and entrepreneurial opportunities with the safety of stable employment. Gen Zers no longer form opinions of a company solely based on the quality of their products/services but on their ethics, practices, and social impact. One of the most significant impact on organizations is that Gen Z influences shift the "balance of power" between the employer and the employee to a model where instead of workers trying to fit into a box called a "job," organizations will need to tailor work around the curated skillset of a worker. This shift in balance is directly related to the more diverse choices Gen Z workers have in an environment of shrinking talent pools, the increase in organizations' demands for following generation skills, all against a backdrop of contracting mmigration policies (Gomez, Mawhinney, & Betts, n.d.; Robinson

2019).

Gen Zers are driven by different needs than the generations that came before them. They also advocate having a more balanced work/life experience to help them escape the burnout that has inflicted older generations, with 38% counting work/life balance as a priority when choosing an employer (Who is GenZ and How Will They Impact the Workplace, 2021).

For Gen Zers, their technological dependence is not necessarily considered an addiction, but rather that they view their mobile devices as "extensions" of themselves. They can even feel anxiety without them. They also use their devices to the extent that their use causes them to lose sleep, but that would appear to "come with the territory."While this can mean they often rely on technology to keep them organized and facilitate communication between departments, there are other arenas where technology can influence how Gen Z does their job. For example, many Gen Zers prefer self-directed learning as a training method for their roles. Microlearning platforms are excellent example of how Gen Z relies on technology to give them the skills they need to succeed at their job (Who is GenZ and How Will They Impact the Workplace, 2021).   Gen Z does not like someone constantly looking over their shoulder. In the long run, it is often more productive to lay out the expectations, trust that they will get it done, and let them come to you with struggles, suggestions, or a need for support. Learning to effectively lead Gen Z could mean going by the honor system. However, at the same time,

Gen Z workers are also highly collaborative. They grew up able to talk to anyone, anywhere, at any time, right at their fingertips–and they have spent their whole lives taking advantage of it. Though they prefer to work in a more isolated habitat, they mostly rely on reaching out and comparing notes, brainstorming, and soliciting olleague feedback (Leonhandt, 2022). In addition, Gen Zers value Work-Life Balance.

Much of Generation Z maintains the personal and professional boundaries that their predecessors dreamed of. They are the least likely to answer an after-hours email or stay past closing time to get ahead on tasks, though there are always exceptions to the rule. The responsibility has been shifted back onto the employer to be prepared by changing their staffing practices to suit the needs of the business. Management's lack of planning is not an emergency for Gen Z workers (Dyer, 2022).

Putting values over employment longevity is less critical to Gen Z than it was to previous generations. They prioritize having a mutually beneficial relationship with their employer. They are not too stressed about staying in a role for a long time, which is why we see more and more "job-hopping" among this generation (Dyer, 2022). Because they grew up in a world where rapidly developing technology and constant communication are the norm, they are highly adaptable. They are often ahead of the curve when it comes to new trends in business (Dyer, 2022).

How to Lead Gen Z

Studies by Dimock (2019) from the Pew Research Center found that some Gen Zers prefer a democratic leadership style that accepts group opinions or suggestions to determine a joint decision that will be used in organizational goals. However, Aquuista and Pandin (2021) concluded that Gen Zers commit to more than one traditional or known leadership style. According to Gen Z ers, good Leadership is characterized by leaders "walking their talk." Specifically, good leaders "lead by example" with a "hands-on approach" and match their words with action (Aquas, 2019).

According to Koulopoulos and Keldsen (2016), Gen Zers crave feedback, mentoring, and coaching. Unlike traditional mentoring, in which the mentor is always a senior individual who can pass on experience without much risk of pushback from the protégé, reverse mentoring provides no haven for the mentor, who can easily be trumped by the protégé's position in the organizational hierarchy. At Cisco, new hires are given access to senior persons whom they could also get coaching, mentoring, and learning,Gen Zers prefer face-to-face coaching to be more effective for their goals. Coaching prompts introspection where Gen Z must turn inward to discover the right answer. This self-reflection and self-evaluation process allows Gen Z to become more productive and dependent because they can apply their self-discovered solutions to similar situations they encounter in the future (Jenkins, 2021). Coaching also creates greater buy-in since the Gen Z employee is arriving at the solution either individually or collectively with the coach (Poswolsky, 2022). The most effective coaching happens when leaders prioritize curiosity over instruction and use the following steps.

Be Timely

Ideally, coaching becomes more effective the closer it has done to the activity or learning opportunity. To ensure the best results, enable timely coaching by leveraging tools like Slack, 15Five, or Loop or by increasing the cadence of the coaching sessions (Cullimore, 2020; Jenkins, 2021)

Be Inquisitive

Asking questions is what makes coaching transformational. However, asking the right questions that elicit the appropriate self-evaluation is difficult and takes practice. Guide Gen Zers toward self-evaluation using strategic questions, which can jumpstart their growth and empower their work. Questions like "What is on your mind?", "What is the real challenge here for you?", "How can I help you?" and even "What more can you tell me?" open opportunities to lead without imposing on their unique thought process (Cullimore, 2020; Jenkins, 2021).

Create learning opportunities

Part of the ambition and drive that Gen Zers have included seeking out knowledge that will best help them reach their career goals and further their professional growth. This also means that they choose not to waste time on education that does not seem valuable. Recognize good work (Jenkins, 2021). Gen Zers work especially hard if they know something is in it for them. Conversely, they are more likely to seek opportunities elsewhere if they have nothing to gain. Fostering an office culture where a job well done is recognized is the first step in helping them reach their potential. In addition, consider offering certain benefits or perks for a few milestones to encourage them better (Cullimore, 2020)

Communicate better
Given that Gen Zers seek more personal and human connections in the workplace, it is no surprise that they will value regular and transparent communication. Being consistent with messages and open about improvements, feedback, and other essential workplace issues demonstrates a real commitment to helping them grow and thrive within the company (Fernandez, Lee & Landis, 2023).

How Will Gen Z Lead?
In projecting how Gen Zers will lead, there is still much that we do not know about this cohort as they make the transition from subordinate to leader. When attempting to translate Gen Z's characteristics and behavior into leadership styles, what is evident is that many Gen Zers prefer face-to-face coaching and a culture that enables change with automating processes and utilizing technology in every aspect of the business to optimize results. They are also entrepreneurial, pragmatic, and increasingly dedicated to work that matters (Jain, 2021; Rampton, 2019) Research of Gen Z employees reveals significant differences in beliefs, characteristics, behaviors, and culture about leaders and Leadership (Klein, 2018). Gen Zers are non-committal to traditional or known leadership styles, even though they value leadership that is influential, results-driven, service-minded, authentic and "lead by example" (Aquas, 2019; Francis & Hoefel, 2018). In reviewing personal and organizational challenges facing Gen Zers (Meet GenZ. The Next Generation is Here Hopeful, Anxious, Hardworking, and Searching for Inspiration, n.d.; Paulk, 2021) discovered that Gen Zers lack the basic human skills as well as having underdeveloped social skills to lead others, much less the knowledge, skills, and motivation to lead a team or an organization (Leonhandt, 2022).
The following examples support the argument that Gen Zers must prepare to lead themselves, much less an organization.

- Gen Zers have a brief attention span (approximately eight seconds).
- A statement that is heard routinely among Gen Zers is "Do not manage me – understand me" (Klein, 2018).
- Gen Zers are very concerned about their inability to communicate and forge strong interpersonal relationships. This may be because technology has negatively impacted their cognitive skill development. They recognize that their social skills, like critical thinking and communication, are weak ("What Do Generation Z and Millennials Expect from Technology in Education?",2018).
- Gen Zers are self-centered and unable to negotiate or compromise, which inevitably can lead to conflict
- Many Gen Zers question the status of managers within an organization. Some say they are unsure they want to manage teams when they enter the workforce, not because they fear responsibilities, but because their experience with authoritarian supervisors has inspired them.
- Gen Zers have been accused of being incurious about others, asking not 'what can I do for your company?' but 'what can you do for me?'
- Gen Zers will likely abandon ship and seek other opportunities if they feel that a company does not align with their core values and make them feel seen, heard, and appreciated (Freifeld, 2022).

Gen Zers are at high risk for addiction since its generation is increasingly lonely and obsessed with social media. Social platforms, such as TikTok and Instagram, pose lifestyles that are not accurate and seem unattainable, especially when it comes to body image. These factors cause high levels of stress and pressure. Nearly a third (31%) of Gen Zers would rate their overall mental health in 2022 as inadequate. When asked to describe their mental health over one month, one out of four reported having more bad days than good. On average, Gen Z reported about ten tough mental health days in one month (Chandler, 2020).

Gen Zers understand that authenticity, empathy, inclusiveness, and flexibility are essential in the workplace. Nevertheless, they also feel cheated out of gaining other crucial soft skills, leaving them unprepared for various occupations (Partida, 2023). The following are five soft skills Gen Z requiring to be successful employees and as future leaders.

Communication

Remote school and work have made it increasingly difficult for Gen Z to develop proper communication skills. However, it is not because they do not want to. 60% of Gen Z workers appreciate constructive feedback to improve performance (Dawkins, 2022).

Networking

Likewise, networking in the Workplace differs from being well-connected on social media. Gen Zers have found LinkedIn challenging to navigate, particularly when gaining exposure to potential employers. Much of this generation also reached their first job search at the height of the pandemic, when employment opportunities were at an all-time low, meaning they had little chance to practice outreach to prospective leaders and companies (How the Pandemic Impacted GenZ's Soft Skills, 2022: "Too Much Screen Time?", 2021).

Negotiating

Gen Z has several expectations for their careers: flexibility, work-life balance, and salary. They have shown more interest in financial incentives, with higher salary expectations than what has typically given at the career entry level. This has put recruiters in an awkward position, but how do you negotiate with talent who does not know how to reciprocate? Negotiation skills are critical in business particularly in sales, since many label Gen Z as a bunch of go-getters, teaching them soft skills can benefit the organization (Kresic, 2022: Wang & Wang, 2021)

Public Speaking

Employers and employees have embraced remote work, which shows little signs of disappearing in the future. Although remote work has its advantages, it is not conducive for Gen Z to practice speaking in front of an audience. Standing before a group and presenting information clearly and engagingly is critical for business success. Gen Z has excellent potential to do this effectively if they learn the necessary public speaking skills (Partida, 2023).

Conflict Resolution

Studies have shown that miscommunication is the leading cause of conflict, while one in four people feel that company leadership needs to handle workplace conflicts better. Additionally, employees feel less job atisfaction the longer they deal with friction at work. Generation Z could benefit from understanding conflict resolution. For starters, it would relieve managers of having to step in constantly. It would also create a more amicable and collaborative workforce that produces results (Partida, 2023; Zemke, Raines, and Fitzpatrick, 2000)

The Deloitte Global GenZ and Millennial Survey (2022) found 70% of Gen Z employees need to gain the mastery of skills needed to do their jobs effectively. This lack of skills affects the performance of junior talent and can lead to high turnover rates, with 31% of Gen-Z talent quitting their job in their first six months due to lack of training (Begg 2022; Sinek, 2022). It is alarming given that this generation of young professionals are crucial to driving the innovation, productivity, and growth of a business's future.Herein lies an opportunity for organizations to provide extensive soft skills training (Upskilling) for Gen Zers, to learn how to communicate

better, whether verbally or written. Upskilling in the early stages of their career is crucial for creating diverse and inclusive workplaces and taking advantage of their tech savviness (Anderson, 2018) As organizations prepare for upskilling, it's essential to consider Gen Z's brief attention span – about eight seconds. This means saying no to the extended format training programs and complex explanations. Instead, employers will benefit from delivering easy-to-understand learning content through simple tools young generations use. According to Rubanovich, (2021) around 51% of Gen Z talent learns best through hands-on learning experiences, while only 12% learn by listening. For organizations to engage a young professional in upskilling it is essential to create a learning-by-doing environment. This structure, however, must be supported by a rewards and benefits system that recognizes hard work through awards and incentives. Given Gen Zers' competitive nature, their performance is often driven by the idea of receiving a corresponding reward, especially financial ones such as raises, bonuses, or even promotions. In summary, the more practical a skill or training seems, the more engaged a Gen Zer will be (Fernandez, Lee, & Landis, 2023: Staglin, 2022).

Conclusion

As the global business environment has become more unpredictable and complex.Leadership matters more today than ever. More than contextual factors such as economic conditions, industry factors, and a firm's overall health, leadership factors now have a much more predictive impact on company performance. Therefore, one of the most critical decisions a company can make is whom to appoint to leadership positions while considering the Dunning-Kruger effect: "People with low skill levels draw wrong conclusions and make wrong decisions but are unable to make mistakes because of their low skill levels" (Cherry, 2022, para.22). This means that a lack of understanding of mistakes made leads to a belief in one's correctness and, consequently, to increased confidence in one's own decisions and oneself, as well as to an awareness of one's superiority (Cherry 2022).

There is still much to learn about Gen Z and how they will impact the future of business, but we must start in the right direction. As a future leader, it is essential that we work with the Gen-Z to create a work-life that is fulfilling and that we maximize the potential this group of people brings with them. By working with Gen Z through upskilling and adaptive leadership training, employers can solve the issues that come up through multiple generations working under one roof and bridging the generation gap. Investing in upskilling not only helps to attract and retain top talent, but also significantly increases the organization's Human Resources, Return on Investment (ROI) (Dyer, 2022. How Upskilling Your Gen-Z Talent Unlocks Their Hugh Potential, 2020; Rockwood, 2022).

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