

GENERATIONS
SERIES

Building leaders for the next decade

HOW TO SUPPORT THE WORKPLACE GOALS OF GEN X, GEN Y AND GEN Z

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Human Capital & Education for Asian Development



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In this capstone report of the *Generations* series, we explore what Gen X, Gen Y and Gen Z think about leadership. What attracts them to leadership roles? What gives them pause? Do these ideas vary by country? And how do women think differently about leadership than men?

THE FINDINGS WILL SHAPE HOW COMPANIES ATTRACT TOP TALENT, BUILD LEADERS AND COMPETE IN THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY.



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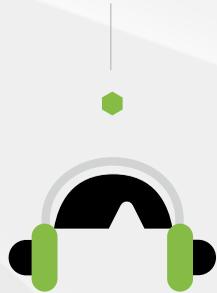
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GEN Z



High school students
born 1997–2002

GEN Y STUDENT



University students
born 1984–1996

GEN Y PROFESSIONAL



Professionals who have obtained
an academic degree
born 1984–1996

GEN X



Professionals who have obtained
an academic degree
born 1965–1983

If you would like to learn more about talent attitudes within your market, please [contact us](#).

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GENERATIONS: RESHAPING THE WORLD

As each generation readies itself to play a dominant role in the global economy, much is written and conjectured about the changes it will bring to the workplace and the global market. Certainly the last three, Gen X, Y and Z, to use their more popular labels, have each been studied and analyzed to an unprecedented extent by academics, businesspeople and policymakers. Are the differences they demonstrate just the expected generational changes or is there something special about each, in terms of the changes they bring to the workplace, to how technology can be optimized and to how leaders can be most effective?

Universum, the INSEAD Emerging Markets Institute and the HEAD Foundation asked this question in a worldwide survey in 2014 in the specific context of Millennials. Commonly held perceptions were busted and new trends were revealed. With this second iteration of our collaboration, we broaden the scope of analysis to the three different generations. Through the systematic measurement and analysis of a significant number of respondents from across the globe, from the most developed to the emerging economies, and with particular focus on workplace, technology and leadership, this survey seeks to take a new look at how the three most recent generations have and are impacting the workplace.

GEN X:

Sandwiched between the baby boomers and the millennials, this generation has had two decades in the workplace. Quietly, they have taken up positions of power in multinational C-suites as well as in the ranks of successful entrepreneurs. They experienced childhoods without computers and witnessed the shift from analog to digital technology in their adulthoods. At work, they are taking over the mantle from the baby boomers and mentoring Gen Y. At home, they are caring for their boomer parents and also their millennial kids who refuse to leave home.



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GEN Y:

One of the most visible



generations in history, Gen Y has forced a new look at everything from Maslow's need hierarchy to how companies do business and the future of the workplace. Growing up with unprecedented access to technology, they have changed everything from whether cars are best bought or shared, to how long it's okay to live with parents and what kind of behavior is acceptable from employees and leaders.

GEN Z:

Poised to enter the workplace soon, this generation was born into a tumultuous world, demonstrated to them in all its VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity) glory through a wide variety of screens. They fear for the future of the planet, value their education, worry about their future careers and want to make the world a better place. They are completely digitally native in the sense of being quite helpless in a non-digital world.



The workplace today is an intriguing blend of multigenerational values, approaches to technology, leadership styles and workplace preferences. Through this global study spanning the three generations, we seek to understand how each group can best be motivated, managed, led

and encouraged to lead, for optimal results.

Building Leaders for the Next Decade

In the brave new workplace, the onus is on employers to create jobs and environments that can compete not just with other employers but with the entrepreneurial mindset of the employees themselves. At the same time, they have to attract, develop and sustain a new generation of leaders, capable of directing the course of their businesses while inspiring trust, passion and the ambition to lead in their subordinates. Even as Gen Y and Gen Z have changed the dynamics of the workplace, have they also changed the traditional patterns of organizational leadership behavior forever?

As companies strive to build their leadership pipelines, it's crucial

to understand whether the new entrants to the workplace even aspire to lead. If they don't, what concerns do these reluctant leaders have and how can these be assuaged? Is there a gap between how one generation wants to lead and how another generation wants to be led? How does this gap vary across genders and geographies? And how can this gap be bridged to allow for seamless integration and effective leadership in the multigenerational workplace? Is distributed leadership the answer? These are some of the questions that this capstone report of our Generations series seeks to answer.

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Richard Saul Wurman is an architect, designer and prolific writer. His most recognized work, however, is the TED conference – an idea he came up with and executed first in 1984, and more successfully in the early '90s.¹ Through his varied experiences, Wurman has become a prominent thought leader on the nature of independent work – or what he calls “indie work.” He wrote recently: “For the first time in human history, individuals can design a life around the pursuit of interesting work.”²

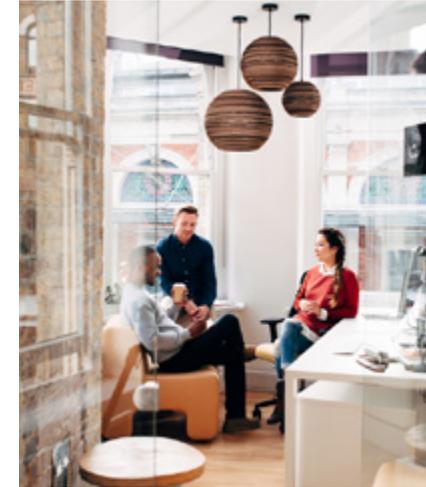
This idea has tremendous implications for employers. Employers are not just competing against other companies to lure top talent; they are competing to win loyalty from those who might otherwise work for themselves as freelancers or independents.

To revise Wurman’s quote: “For the first time in human history,

employers must design a workplace and culture that will promote interesting work.”

In a world in which companies must truly provide an inspirational vision for the future – both to attract top talent and to steer a course for the companies they lead – the idea of leadership development is absolutely critical. How do companies develop and sustain a new generation of leadership? Does the roadmap look different for women? For particular regions? How can companies develop strategies that take leadership diversity into account?

This eBook is a continuation of a series called *Generations* – a collaboration among Universum, INSEAD Emerging Markets Institute, The HEAD Foundation and MIT Leadership Center. It is a one-of-a-kind research study of what global generations think about employers



and the workplace. The insights in this series are based on an annual survey of over 18,000 students and professionals worldwide – from Gen Xers who’ve been in the workplace for two decades to Gen Z students. The research sheds light on preferred work styles, leadership qualities, hopes and fears about future careers, and the technologies with the highest potential for workplace innovation.

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¹ <https://www.ted.com/about/our-organization/history-of-ted>

² From “Solo City” report. A research project from the Knight Foundation and The Solo Project.

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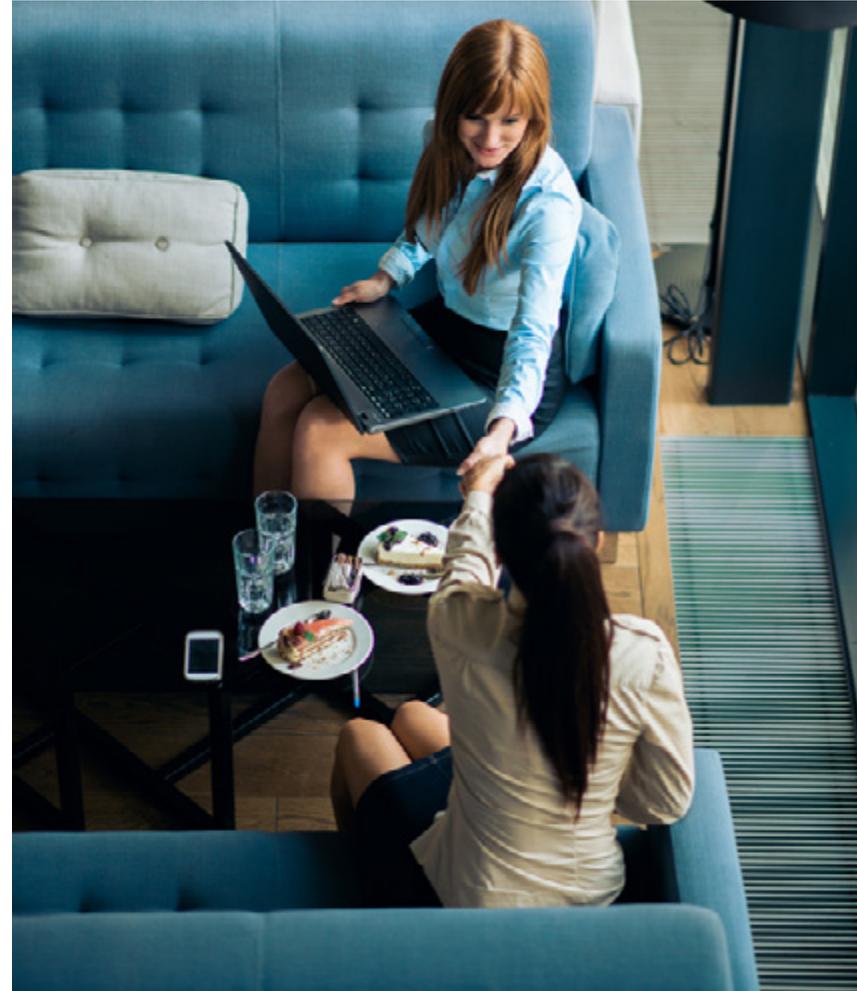
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How does each generation think about itself? And what does each think of older and younger peers?

Before we dive into the details of every generation's interest in leadership, let's review how each thinks of itself and one another. We wanted to understand: do generational stereotypes persist? Are there common themes that can be instructive to employers? What we found was surprising and, in some instances, even amusing.



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Gen Y

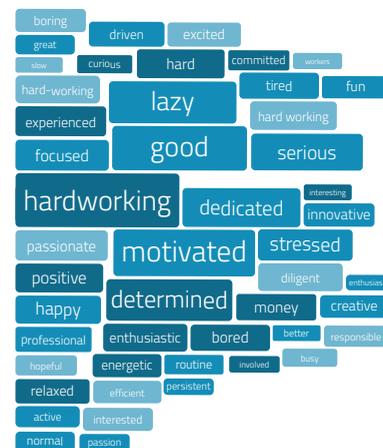


Generation Y also chooses “lazy” as a top descriptor of itself, though “motivated” and “ambitious” are mentioned in equal parts. Stereotypes about millennials have persisted for years – though more recently there appear to be more serious efforts to throw off the yolk of popular stereotypes. In a sign that millennials may soon shed the “lazy” label, the younger generation characterizes millennials as hardworking and motivated.

What Gen Y says about themselves:



Generation Z on Generation Y:



Generation X on Generation Y:



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01

Not all are enthusiastic about leadership roles. The desire to lead varies greatly by age and region.

The importance of reaching a leadership position – based on the global average – is high within each generation. Over 60 percent of Gen Z and Gen Y cite it as important. Gen X is slightly less enthusiastic – 57 percent say it matters. Yet if we examine the findings by country, enthusiasm about leadership positions varies tremendously. In the Nordic countries, for example, respondents are much less likely to think leadership is important, while respondents from Mexico were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about it.

These findings are important for companies to understand because they may point to significant talent development hurdles within the

organization, and not always the most obvious ones. For example, a company with a presence in the Nordic countries might use the data to understand its own executive workforce better, and investigate leadership development options for its high-potential candidate. Yet in Mexico, the opposite is true: how can you keep workers motivated who may be interested in leadership, but who won't attain it? (For example, 76 percent of Gen Y professionals from Mexico say attaining a leadership role is important. Realistically, some portion of those who indicated it is important will not achieve it as there are not enough traditional leadership roles to make that attainable.) [FIGURE 1](#) / [FIGURE 2](#)



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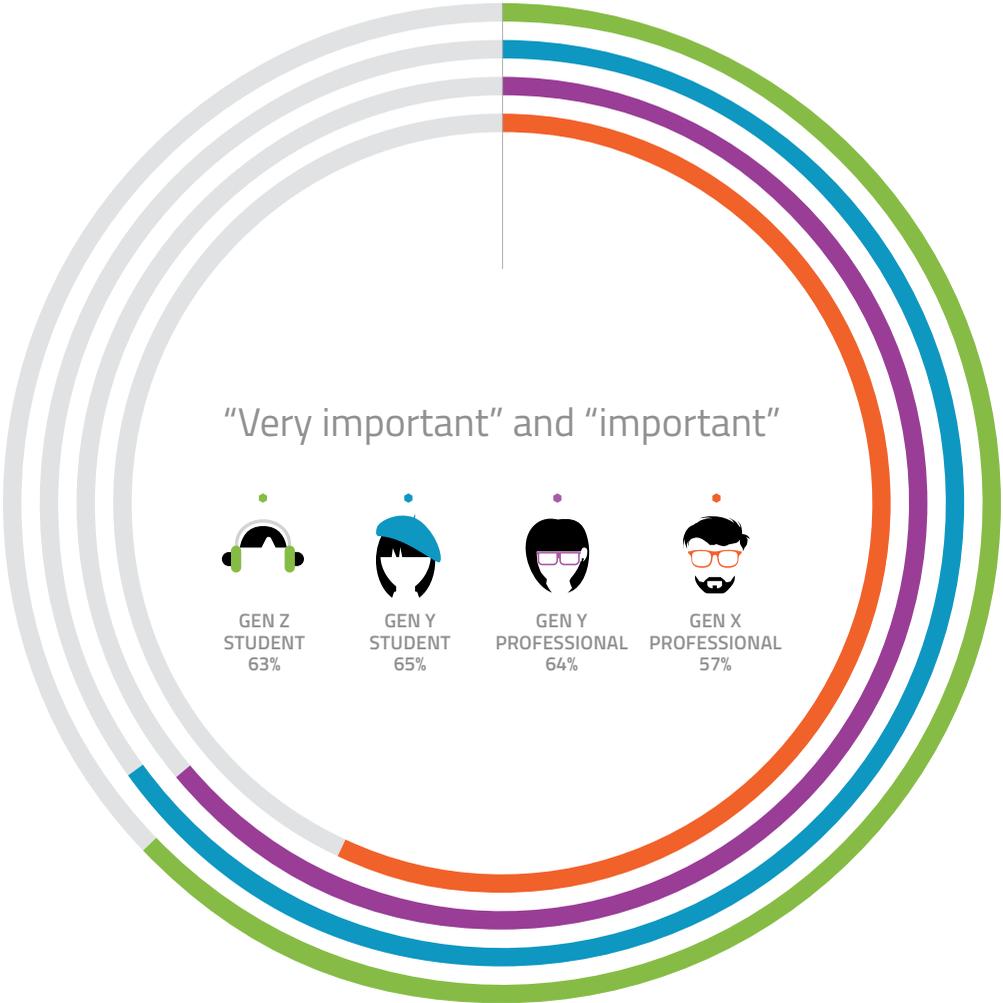
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HOW IMPORTANT IS IT THAT YOU BECOME
A LEADER DURING YOUR CAREER?

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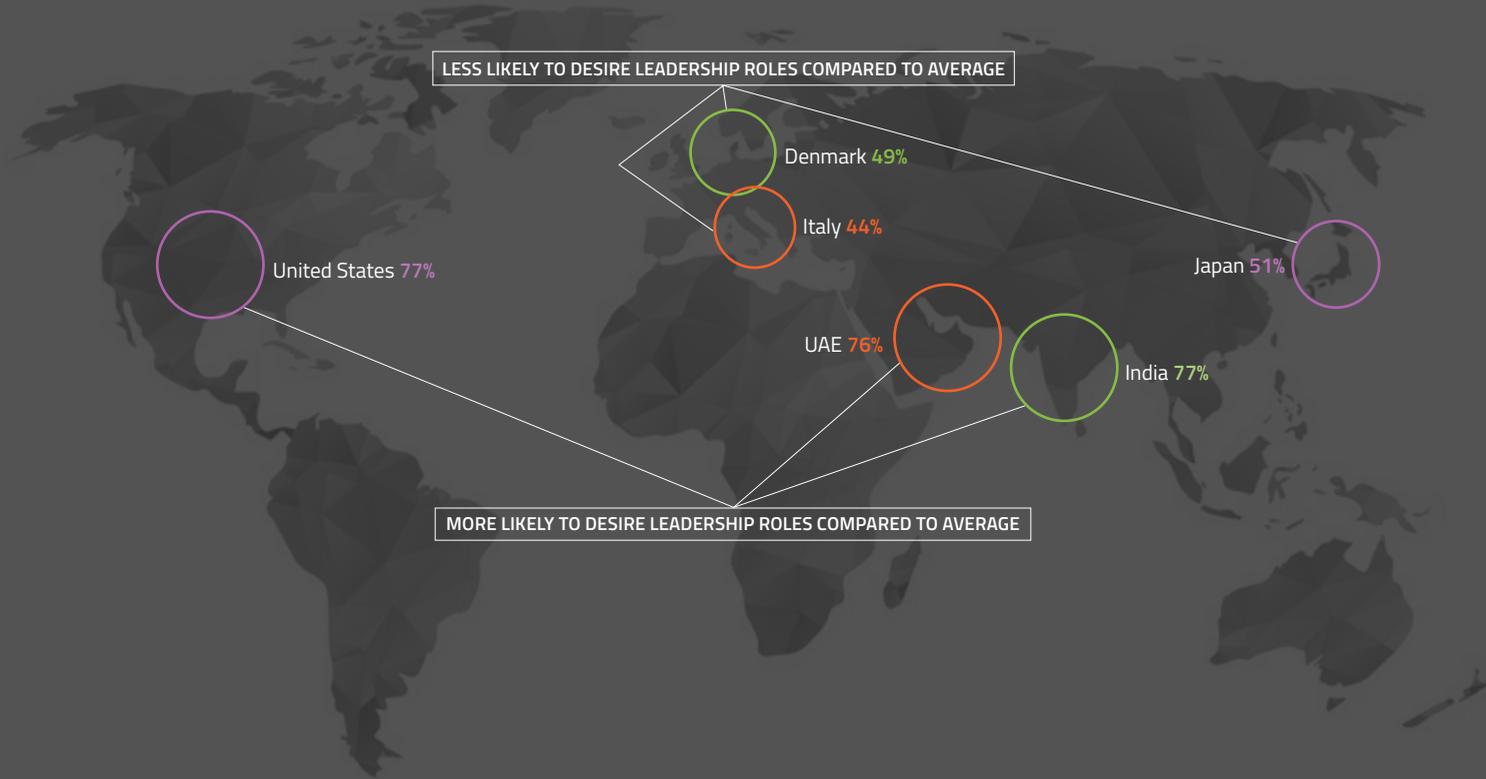
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FIGURE 2
COUNTRY HOTSPOTS

LESS LIKELY TO DESIRE LEADERSHIP ROLES COMPARED TO AVERAGE **VS** MORE LIKELY TO DESIRE LEADERSHIP ROLES COMPARED TO AVERAGE

The percent who say becoming a leader is "important" or "very important."

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02

Stress – be it the perception of stress or experience with it – prevents many from seeking out leadership roles.

In every generation we surveyed, the quality that makes leadership roles most unattractive is high levels of stress. Gen Z is most likely to worry about it (58 percent cite it) but even the older, wiser Gen X isn't immune (52 percent of Gen X respondents say stress makes leadership roles unattractive).

In some countries, the levels of stress – whether real or perceived – is particularly high. In the United States, 74 percent of Gen Y professionals cite stress as a negative associated with leadership

(the country with the highest response rate for that attribute among Gen Y). And in Italy, Gen X regards high levels of stress as a top barrier; 71 percent of Italians in that generation cite it. [FIGURE 3](#) / [FIGURE 4](#)



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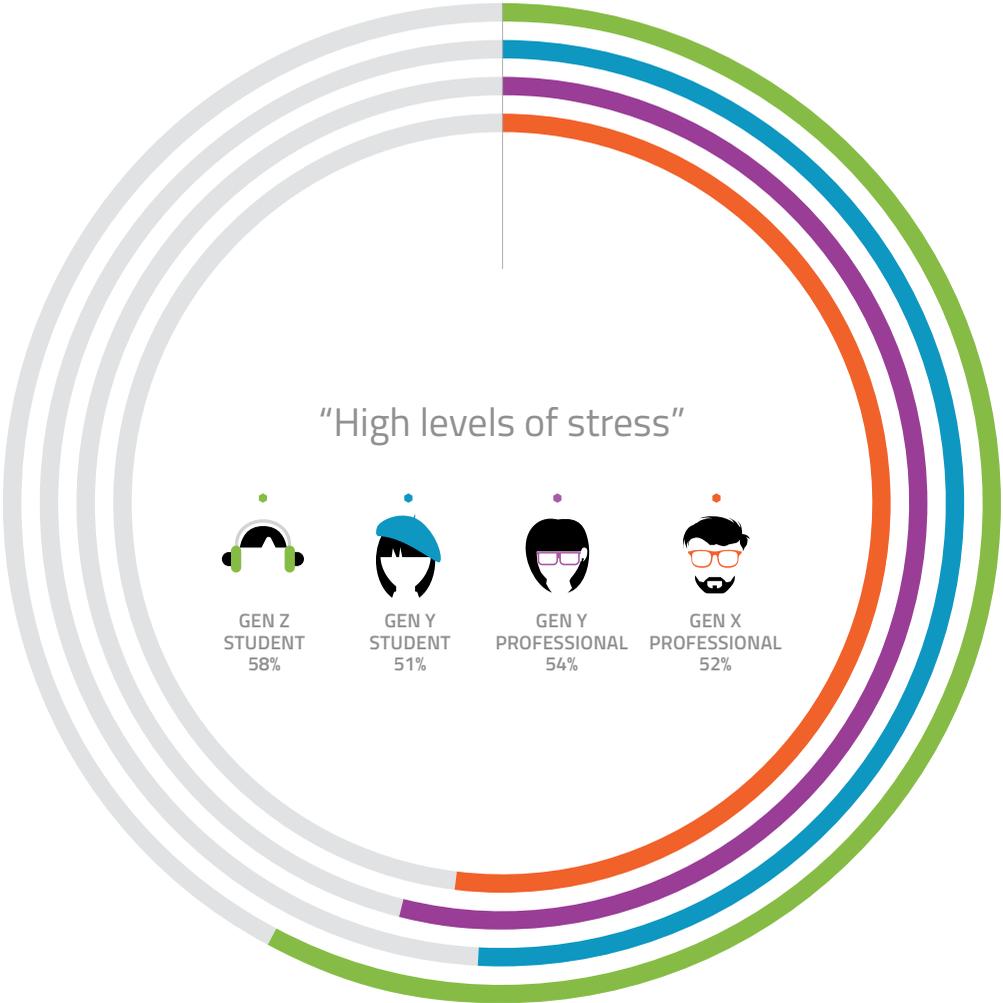
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FIGURE 3
WHAT ARE THE MAIN REASONS YOU CONSIDER
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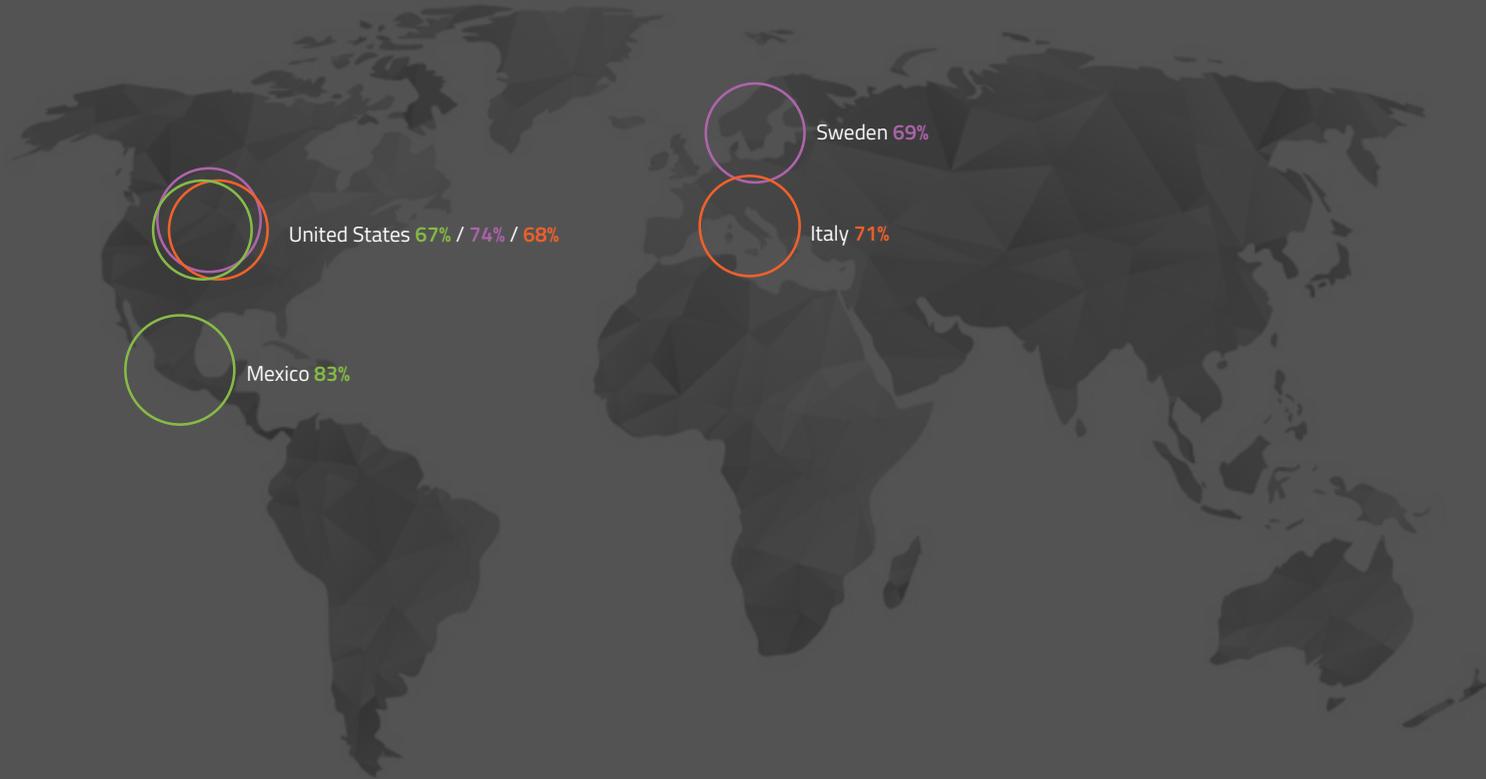
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FIGURE 4
COUNTRY HOTSPOTS

WHERE IS STRESS ABOUT LEADERSHIP HIGHEST?

By Generation



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03

Work-life balance is a significant barrier to leadership for Gen Y and Gen X professionals.

On average, more than one-third of working professionals say challenges associated with work-life balance make leadership unattractive. As with other factors, the degree of challenge varies by country/region. In Switzerland and Russia, more than half of Gen X respondents say it's an issue, while fewer than one in four cite it in Italy, France and Norway.

[FIGURE 5](#) / [FIGURE 6](#)



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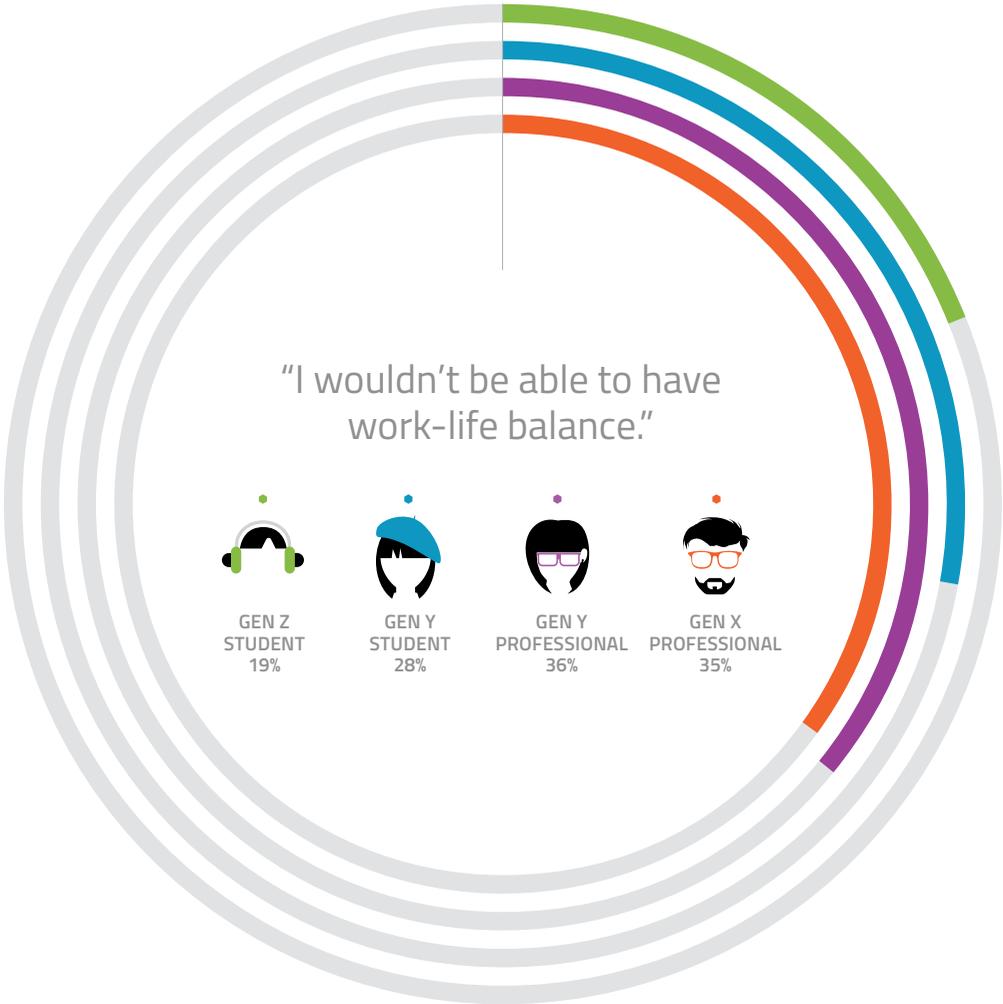
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FIGURE 5
WHAT ARE THE MAIN REASONS YOU CONSIDER
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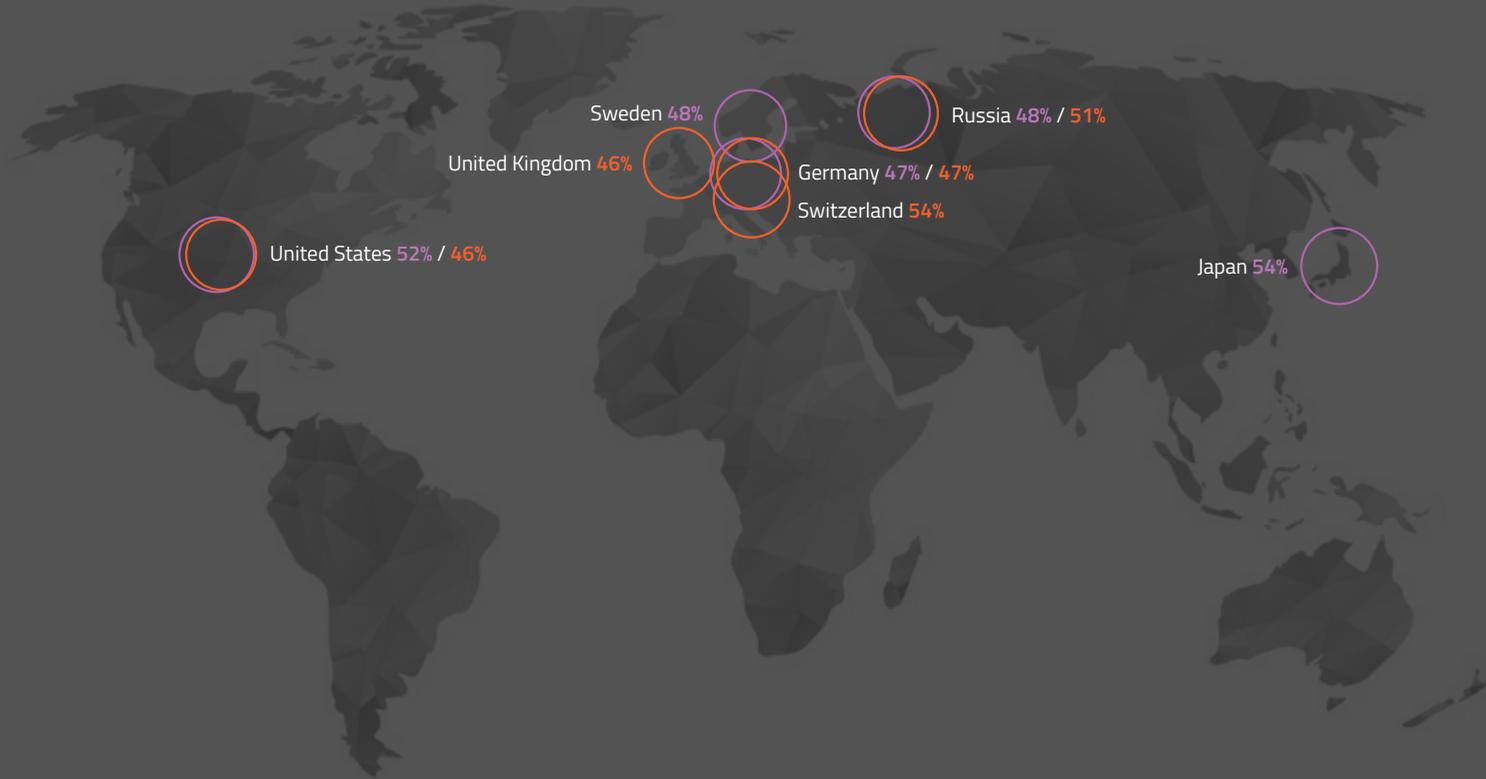
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FIGURE 6
COUNTRY HOTSPOTS

WHERE LEADERSHIP IMPINGES
ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Countries in which professionals are more likely to say leadership roles are unattractive because they get in the way of work-life balance.

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04

Gen Z students – who haven't yet been tested in the workplace – say leadership roles are unattractive because they may expose their own weaknesses.

While stress is most often cited as the unattractive side of leadership, Gen Z also cites the fear of failing in a leadership role (34 percent) and their lack the confidence required to lead (33 percent). Both findings are understandable given Gen Z's relative inexperience. (The data shows that these fears diminish as workers get older; both the fear of failing and lack of confidence continue decreasing in each older generation.) [FIGURE 7](#)



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FIGURE 7

COUNTRY HOTSPOTS

GEN Z EXPLAINS THEIR FEARS ABOUT LEADERSHIP

While “stress” is the most common response when asked what makes leadership unattractive, Gen Z worries about a number of other issues, depending on country.

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05

The positives of leadership? Here we see a greater diversity of responses – both within each generation and across all generations.

While respondents tended to agree about the most unattractive qualities of leadership roles, there was less agreement about what makes leadership attractive. Gen Z favors the higher level of responsibility, while Gen X sees the opportunity to coach and mentor others as a plus. (In Germany and the US, roughly half of Gen Xers say they view the ability to

coach/mentor as an attractive aspect of leadership.)

Gen Y professionals were much more likely to view “challenging work” as a benefit of leadership when compared to Gen Z and Gen X (an interesting finding given that Gen X is likely to view them as “lazy”). In the UK, 43 percent of Gen Y professionals noted

“challenging work” as a benefit of leadership roles – a notably different finding from the rest.

Also surprising: Gen Y professionals were most likely to cite “high future earnings” as a plus, even though popular stereotypes say Millennial care more about values and culture than financial remuneration.

[FIGURE 8](#)



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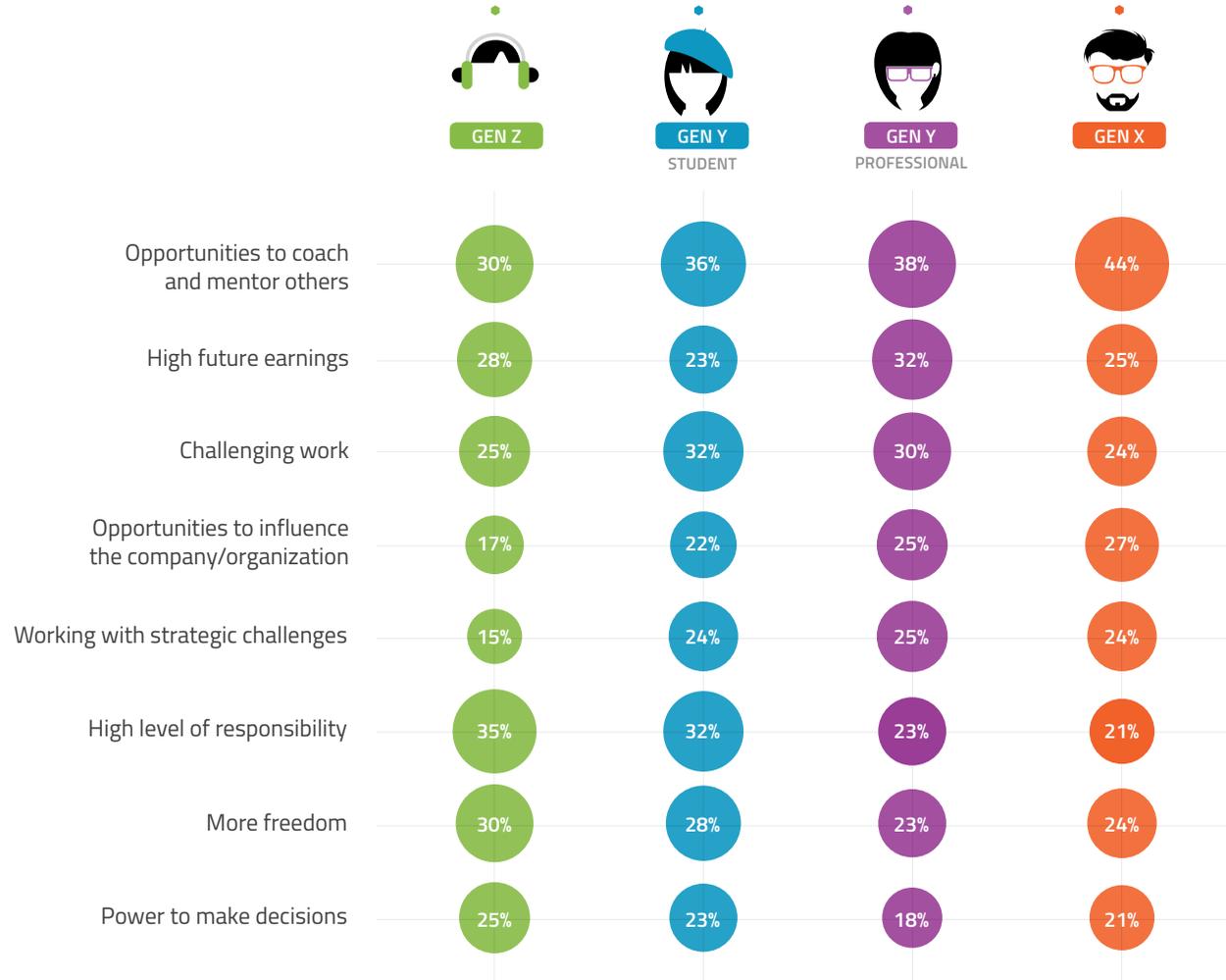
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FIGURE 8

WHY ARE LEADERSHIP ROLES ATTRACTIVE?

A comparison of generations based on global averages.



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The way women think about leadership varies significantly from men – and the implications are serious for employers who want to promote them.

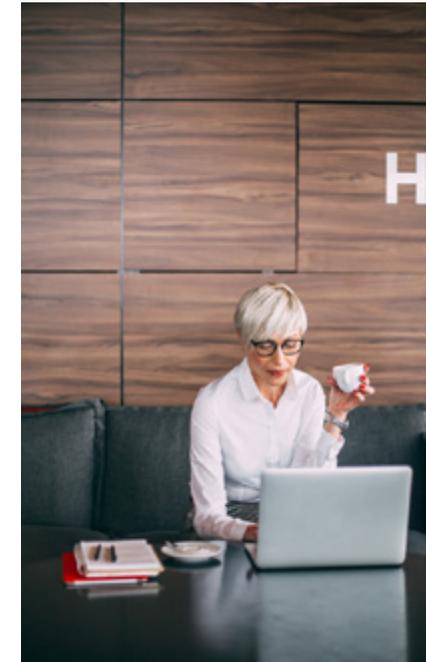
Our research shows women are more likely to be put off by stress, more likely to feel they lack the confidence to lead and more likely to fear failing than their male colleagues.

Why the lack of confidence?

A 2016 research study on women in the workforce by McKinsey & Co. and LeanIn.org offers some answers.³ The authors say subtle biases over time add up to greater career “friction.” For example, women feel they have less access to senior leadership and that they are consulted less at work. In other

words, there isn’t a single event that signals that the path to the top is too difficult, but rather a collection of smaller slights, omissions, etc. that lead to that outcome.

Regarding the *attractive* aspects of leadership, women are more likely to enjoy the challenging work involved (this is particularly true of Gen X women), as well as coaching and mentoring others (Gen X and Gen Y women professionals). Men in all generations are much more likely than women to say that leadership is attractive due to high future earnings and a high level of responsibility. [FIGURE 9](#) / [FIGURE 10](#)



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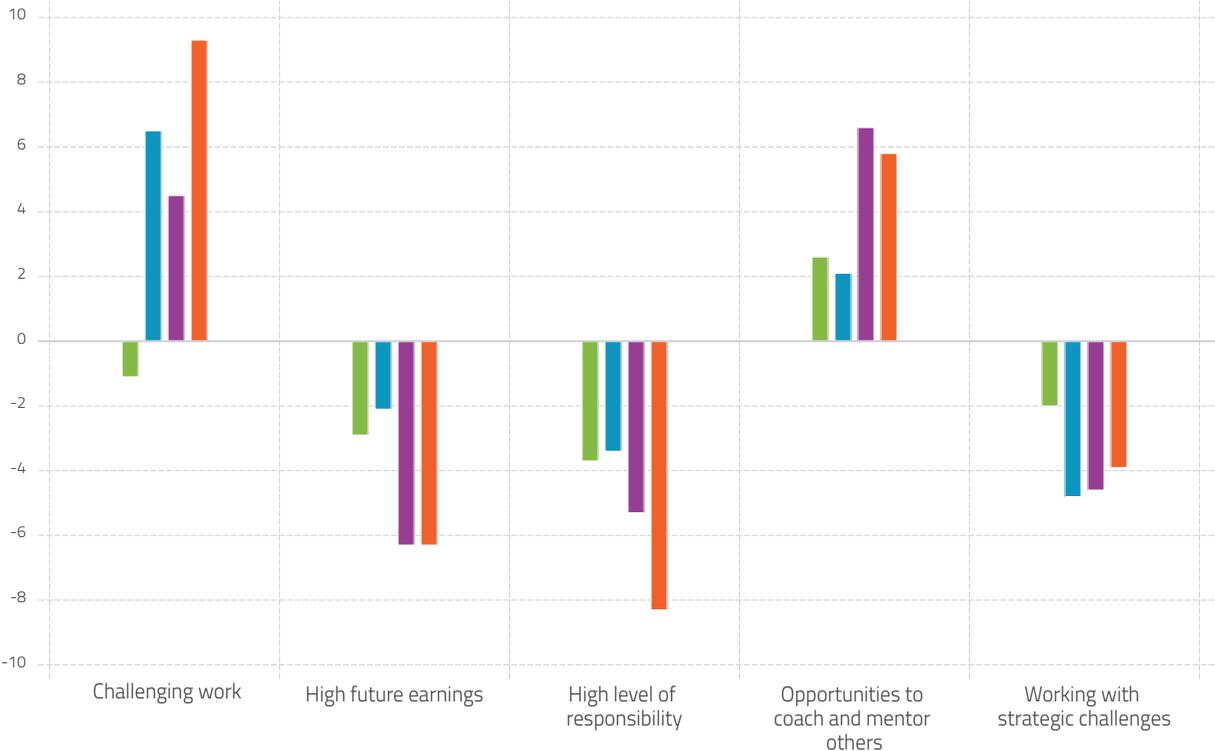
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³ <https://womenintheworkplace.com/>

FIGURE 9
LEADERSHIP ROLE
ATTRACTIVENESS



GEN Z



GEN Y
STUDENT



GEN Y
PROFESSIONAL



GEN X

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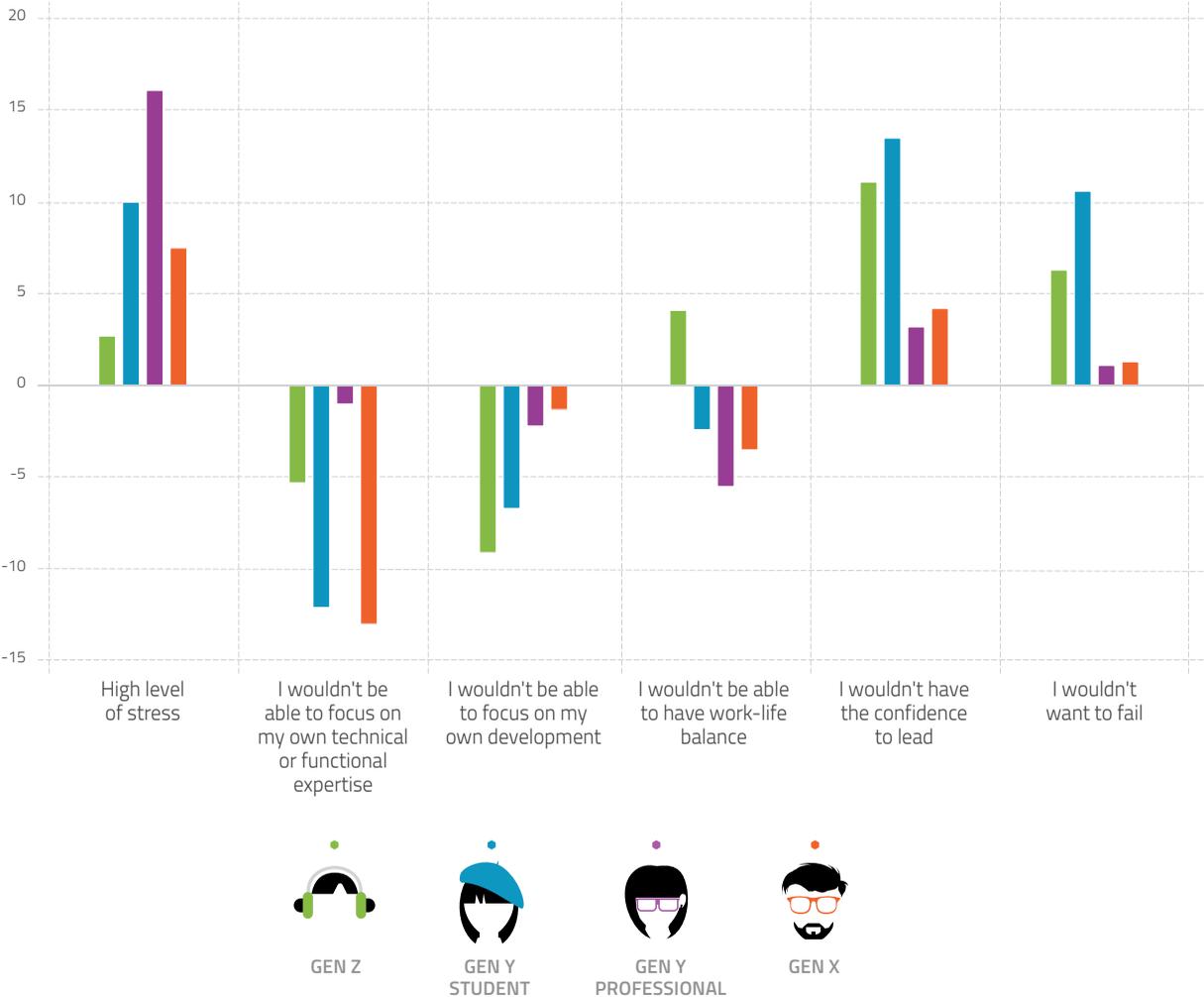
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FIGURE 10
LEADERSHIP ROLE
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07

There is a high degree of alignment between Gen X and Gen Y about preferred leadership styles. Gen Z, however, has a different mind.

Open communication and feedback are most often cited as qualities Gen X and Gen Y prefer in leaders. For Gen Z, a positive attitude is most important.

These differences – while not large – do have implications for the ways in which generations lead and prefer to be led. The difference is most pronounced in how Gen X

leads, and what Gen Z expects from a leader. For example: 35 percent of Gen Z say they expect “motivating behavior,” while just 25 percent of Gen X say they offer this. Similarly, 23 percent of Gen X leaders say they offer “strong personal ethics,” even though just 12 percent of Gen Z expect this. These gaps, though they may appear small on the surface, create fissures that over

time may threaten the success of relationships between leaders and their employees. The research findings not only show the gap in expectations between Gen X managers and Gen Z employees, it also highlights a future flashpoint as Gen Z becomes a greater share of the workforce, and Gen X is often in a position to manage them.

[FIGURE 11](#)



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FIGURE 11
WHICH LEADERSHIP STYLE DO THE GENERATIONS HAVE?

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Recommendations



Expand your definition of leadership.

Consider the notion of “distributed leadership” (DL), an idea born in education and first adapted for business by researchers at MIT.

An organization that values distributed leadership believes leadership isn’t a rank or a particular role, but is based on completing tasks that influence the organization (or its people) in a meaningful way. The theory teaches that someone who is a leader today may become a follower tomorrow, and vice versa. The DL model helps organizations leverage leadership capabilities throughout the organization, and innovate and grow in a dynamic marketplace. The concept of distributed leadership is used extensively in well-known tech companies like Google, but isn’t a popular concept outside of high-growth tech.

Distributed networks can help employees feel more engaged and give leadership opportunities to a wider group.⁴ Collaboration is built into the very fabric of a DL organization, making teams more responsive and effective. Google’s founders famously penned a letter to new investors when it went public, saying it would not bow to traditional organizational structures as a public company, but preserve its DL roots. “Google is not a conventional company,” they wrote. “We do not intend to become one.”⁵

Promote a culture of experimentation.

Stress, whether real or perceived, is a massive barrier to attracting qualified talent to consider leadership roles. Organizations have found success by flipping the leadership development model and “starting at the end,” or focusing on

helping employees achieve results in a lower-risk environment.⁶

Food and agricultural giant Cargill gives managers “safe to fail” challenges, helping them exercise their strategic thinking and risk-taking in a safe environment. The program gives executives a chance to try out new ideas that have the potential to influence the organization, without the high-stakes stress of real-life problem-solving.

Focus on the “work” side of work-life balance.

Work-life balance is not an issue only for women. Research shows men are seeking less stressful jobs and more balance for their families. One-third say they would take a pay cut to achieve better balance.⁷

⁴ <https://hbr.org/2010/04/its-not-all-about-me-its-all-a.html>

⁵ <https://hbr.org/2010/05/how-i-did-it-googles-ceo-on-the-enduring-lessons-of-a-quirky-ipo>

⁶ <https://hbr.org/2016/04/leadership-development-should-focus-on-experiments>

⁷ <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-38607682>

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For employers, the issue is less about helping employees achieve balance (after all, one half of the equation is out of their hands) and more about rethinking productivity. No employee should require 11 hours at work to be productive, and no employer should support this type of schedule. Gone are the days when “work martyrs” were seen as effective managers.

Governments are chiming in to support this idea.⁸ In France, companies with more than 50 employees now must guarantee the “right to disconnect.” That is, they can no longer expect employees to check emails and phones after work hours. In Tokyo, government workers must leave their jobs by 8pm. And in Germany, the law says managers cannot contact employees on their vacations. (In an illustration of how these policies may play out in the future, in late 2016 two politicians were elected

co-leaders of the Green Party in England and Wales—a move hailed as a “pioneering” example of distributing one job’s demanding schedule across two competent individuals.⁹)

Country-level regulations are a start, but government intervention is unlikely to fix the real culprit: inefficiency. A study by Bain & Company of communications inside two dozen large global companies found rampant inefficiency. Senior executives, they found, receive more than 200 emails per day. And on average, supervisors spend eight hours per week sending, reading and receiving email messages.¹⁰ Multiplied across the workforce, across a year, and the amount of time pushing the proverbial paper is astounding.

To free up more time – and use that time to go home – employers must help their employees become

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⁸ <http://time.com/4620532/countries-work-life-balance/>

⁹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-37166203>

¹⁰ <https://hbr.org/2017/01/why-the-french-email-law-wont-restore-work-life-balance>



better guardians of their time in an age of information overload. Bain consultant Michael Mankins says: “In our work with clients, we have come to believe that the best way to do this is to provide real-time information to leaders regarding organizational load, defined as the total hours devoted to reading and responding to emails originating from each executive.”¹¹

Onboarding Generation Z will require a different mindset than those that came before.

In our study, Gen Z shows itself to be more fearful and less confident than older generations. Much more so than their older peers, they fear failing in a leadership role and lack confidence to lead. How do companies grapple with this? Research shows on-the-job stress is a major driver of turnover (as many as 40 percent of those who resign from positions do so due to stress).

Gen Z needs a shot of confidence as they enter the workforce.¹² Employers should consider the “intrapreneurship” model for this generation: the idea that even inside large organizations, companies can help employees carve out time and resources to “tinker” or focus on innovation work that’s outside the bounds of their day-to-day responsibilities. These smaller pet projects can help Gen Z gain confidence through real-world problem-solving, and stoke their confidence in a setting that’s not so far removed from their university training experience.

In the face of so much diversity, let your employees find entrepreneurial answers to their leadership needs.

How do you fulfill the needs of employees from so many countries, with so many unique interests and aspirations? What other options

exist for high-growth companies focused on innovation?

The answer, according to Milan Samani and Robert J. Thomas, is *not* to pull professionals away from work for leadership development training, but to find ways to deliver leadership development insights at work. The authors wrote in the *Harvard Business Review*:

“We find that the most forward-thinking companies are identifying and growing leaders in the midst of pursuing critical business objectives, as opposed to sending them off to far-flung educational programs and hoping they return with “big” insights about themselves and the world.”¹³

The duo point to examples at Barclays and Unilever, both of which have developed their own versions of innovation labs. (Barclays’ program is called Social Intrapreneur Challenges and Unilever’s is named

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¹¹ <https://hbr.org/2014/05/your-scarcest-resource>

¹² <http://www.workforce.com/2007/11/16/role-of-workplace-stress-in-turnover-undervalued/>

¹³ <https://hbr.org/2016/12/your-leadership-development-program-needs-an-overhaul>



UL2020.) These programs hand-pick employees, who are then encouraged to tackle complex problems – whether related to the business in which they work or society at large. The key to success is participants’ understanding that their company is supporting free-thinking rather than stifling it,

which means they can think more expansively about the problems and take bigger risks. And rather than a single training curriculum, employees are able to tackle problems that truly interest them.

When devising leadership development programs for women, begin by asking women what they need and want.

We know women reach leadership roles less often than men. At each higher level of corporate hierarchy, women are fewer and fewer, according to the joint study by McKinsey and LeanIn.org.¹⁴

The phenomenon isn’t due to attrition, say the study authors, as rates of attrition are roughly the same for women and men. The McKinsey research shows women are less likely to be promoted, and so less likely to end up in leadership positions because their rise is slower

and more difficult. Understanding the “why” behind the headwinds facing women is absolutely critical to close the gap – and the findings from the McKinsey research as well as this report provide interesting clues.

That said, it’s essential to conduct *your own internal research*. Use these insights as your baseline, then test how accurate they are for the high-caliber women you believe have leadership potential. What in particular do they see as stumbling blocks inside your organization and within their lives? The McKinsey study, for example, suggests women face inequality related to corporate accountability: “Even though more than 70 percent of companies say they are committed to diversity, less than a third of their workers see senior leaders held accountable for improving gender outcomes.”¹⁵

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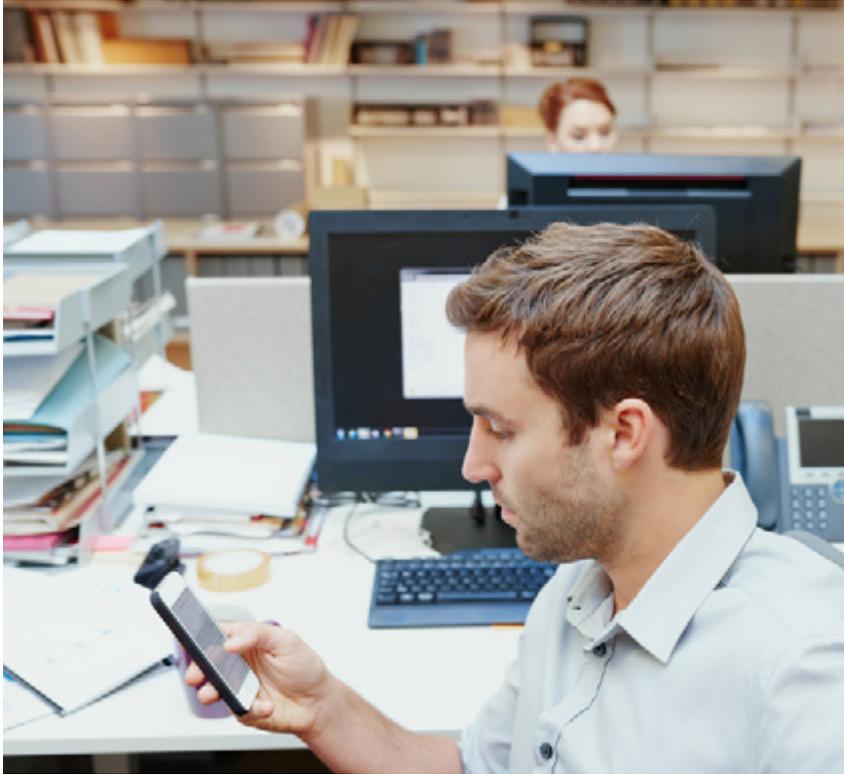
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¹⁴ <https://womenintheworkplace.com/>

¹⁵ <http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/women-in-the-workplace-2016>



When you perform the research, think carefully about whether you'll use an online survey tool or in-person interviews. Each has benefits as well as serious drawbacks. Online tools offer speed and confidentiality (even anonymity if needed), but low response rates can jeopardize the validity of your findings. Plus online tools can miss the types of subtle insights that one-on-one conversations garner.

For such an important and possibly sensitive topic, an in-person interview may deliver the richest results (assuming questions are well designed and the person interviewing is viewed as trustworthy). The stories behind the answers – something you can only get through an in-person interview – may offer more insights than a quantitative survey can deliver.

Finally, examine the distributed leadership model discussed

above as it relates to women. What aspects of leadership are unattractive to women, and are there roles for women in a DL model that minimize those factors? For example, gaining leadership is often equated with gaining a higher level of responsibility. Yet our study indicates women are much less likely than men to view added responsibility as attractive. In a distributed leadership model, the less attractive, hierarchical model of growing responsibility (e.g. more direct reports) is replaced with a deeply collaborative and dynamic model – something that may be more attractive to a subset of high-talent women.

Treat the multigenerational workforce as a research agenda inside your company.

Our work in the area of inter-generational research has shown some of the most meaningful

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insights can be found in the “gaps” – the misalignment of goals, work style or values between generations, each of which can cause tiny relationship fissures. These fissures, if left unattended, create inefficiency at best, and resentment at worst.

If a company can understand both the shared beliefs and the gaps among generations, they can make better decisions about training, leadership development and even culture building. We present the global-level insights here that have wide applicability, but in truth companies must be guided by the insights that apply to their countries, industries and workforce. Use this report as a starting point to launch a discussion about generational workforce issues.

Take pains to find local solutions based on local – even individual – knowledge.

Our research repeatedly points to the incredible diversity of outlooks, work styles and values of both students and professionals when examined country by country. Organizations may be tempted to cut corners, importing what is a successful leadership program in the UK, for example, to their colleagues in the US. In fact, managers must take a surgical approach to leadership development – always arriving at solutions that are relevant for a particular country or region based on what the research indicates.

Beyond “localization” (defined by region), talent managers should also consider taking development programs a step further, investigating “personalization.” Just as Cargill invites executives to try out new ideas in a controlled environment, and as Unilever asks participants to think beyond the walls of the organization to influence societal problems, so too should your organization look for opportunities that allow your employees to set the pace, vision and direction. With an entrepreneurial mindset fueling your leadership development initiatives, it’s possible to develop highly local opportunities that meet the needs of the *individual* rather than the generation, region or division.

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This research report is a collaboration among Universum, INSEAD Emerging Markets Institute, The HEAD Foundation and MIT Leadership Center. It includes responses from 18,337 individuals in 19 countries with statistically relevant sample sizes. Find the breakdown of countries and generations, as well as generation definitions, in the tables on the right.

RESPONDENTS BY COUNTRY AND GENERATION

All global averages presented here are a straight average of each country below, with Nordic countries treated as a single unit

Country	 Gen Z	 Gen Y Students	 Gen Y Professionals	 Gen X
	Canada	290	259	234
China	103	156	283	248
Denmark	334	246	89	170
Finland	239	204	105	193
France	61	290	218	160
Germany	215	379	193	187
India	503	459	314	273
Italy	293	489	219	195
Japan	132	91	230	115
Mexico	306	251	271	208
Norway	399	242	130	154
Russia	99	232	263	202
Spain	254	339	217	190
Sweden	372	233	178	224
United Kingdom	367	262	281	277
United States	288	605	472	216
TOTAL	4255	4737	3697	3175

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