

Bridging the Generation Gap

Designing the
future



Amrop

Leaders For What's Next

Designing the future

Attracting and retaining the next generation of leaders.
Bringing out the best in them to secure performance today.
Establishing a leadership pipeline for tomorrow.

Bridging the generation gap is an existential matter.

Boards and C-suite teams need foresight, insight and skill to build environments that align the characteristics, aspirations and needs of the new gen with those of the business. Many organizations have succession systems in place – others are lagging. Where should the focus be?

And as businesses thrive or fail on daily interactions, are leaders doing enough?



A 3-part series based on in-depth interviews with senior Amrop Partners from Northern and Central Europe, Asia, North and South America.



The story so far

Covid-19. A digital world with a steady diet of social media. Global turbulence and hybrid working. The next generation of leaders has evolved in a unique environment and developed distinctive characteristics. A reliance on digital communication has undermined the ability of some to handle complex interactions or build consensus. A preference for AI-generated info snippets is combining with declines in academic performance and an exodus from the higher education that would have taught the rigor, discernment and resilience that are so vital for leadership.

The next generation prioritizes purpose, with most Gen Zs and millennials seeking value alignment with their employers, and rejecting those who don't match beliefs such as the need for sustainability. Money also matters - many live paycheck to paycheck – and only 32% of global respondents to the 2026 Edelman Trust Barometer believe that the next generation will be better off.

Still, financial reward ranks below wellbeing and family. Furthermore, rapid learning and skill development are top attractors, and there is a clear appetite for a clear promotion path to leadership. At the same time, a hunger for freedom and entrepreneurship is driving interest in start ups, flexibility, and side jobs. Corporate career designers can respond by offering horizontal moves, rotations, and intrapreneurial roles.

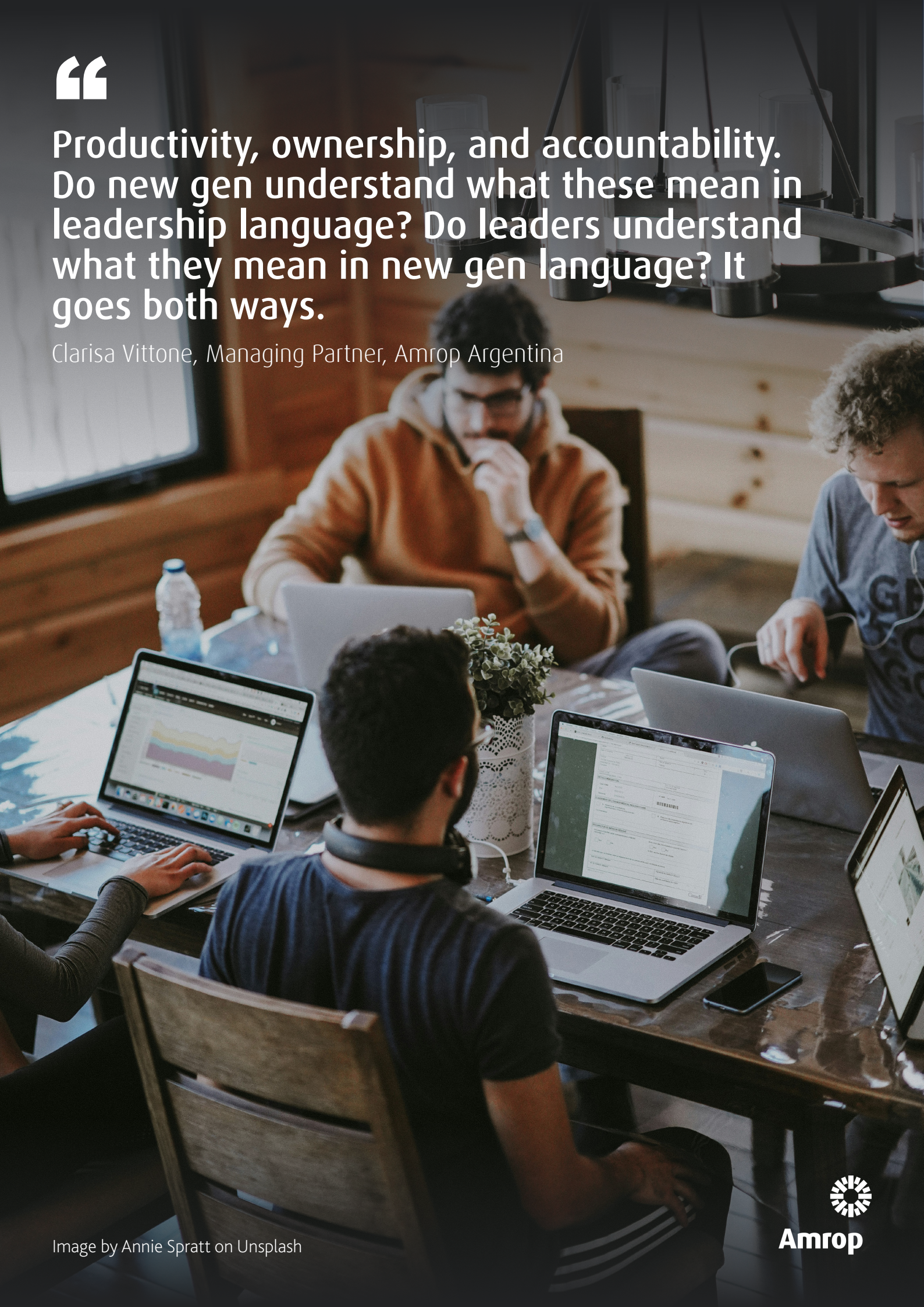


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Productivity, ownership, and accountability. Do new gen understand what these mean in leadership language? Do leaders understand what they mean in new gen language? It goes both ways.

Clarisa Vittone, Managing Partner, Amrop Argentina

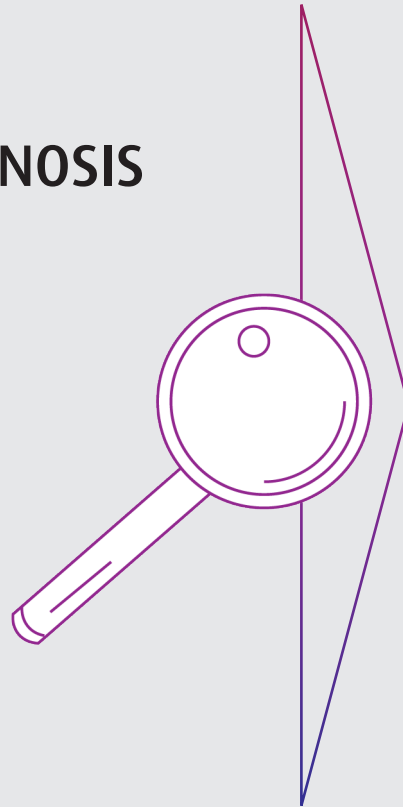


New gen development

A structured journey to leadership

1

DIAGNOSIS



Demographics

How many Gen Z? Older millennials? Younger millennials? Gen X? Who is at the table? Is the data clear?

Context

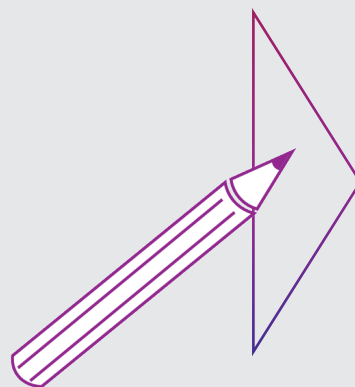
What external factors could be relevant to new gen development? Threats, pandemics, geopolitical tensions, supply chain scarcity, import barriers, climate issues?

Culture

What culture do you seek, in line with your organizational mission, vision and strategy? What culture do you see emerging, related to new gen characteristics and behavior? Where are the gaps, related to your business plan (P&L, return on CapEx.)

2

DESIGN



Roadmap

A leadership model for talent development and cross skilling (an important new gen motivator). Related to the current and desired culture. Accounting for new gen needs: *curiosity, free thinking, occasional cynicism, feeling part of something bigger*. Spanning a range of initiatives, over minimum 1 year. Emphasis on engagement and inspiration, opening up skills and perspectives.



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An existential matter Implications for the Board and C-suite

Over the past 25 years, directive, autocratic leadership has steadily faded from the executive hiring radar. It has been replaced by an emphasis on democracy - dialogue and feedback. On authenticity. On autonomy within co-agreed parameters. All of this is hardly news. Nor is the need for leaders to accept positive confrontation.

What has changed is the sheer extent to which executives will need to embody these qualities if they are to grow their successors.

But democratic leadership is particularly difficult in the current geopolitical and technological maelstrom. As operational and financial pressures build, leaders are fighting to stay above water, let alone holding a course through it.

Even if hiring organizations emphasize democratic leadership in candidate briefs, some Amrop Partners are seeing a creeping tendency for more forceful profiles to make the final cut.

Our interviewees have a tough message for leaders who have invested years in building their careers (and egos) along hard-won paradigms such as hiding their vulnerability. "We need to unlearn, and relearn from the new generation," says İrem Yüksel, Managing Partner of Amrop Türkiye and the CIS. "To coach them, whilst receiving reverse mentoring. It's a two-way street now." Anna Bonde is Managing Partner, Amrop Sweden. She agrees that if the leadership fundamentals remain firmly valid, current leaders need to adapt to their successors. Clarisa Vittone, Managing Partner of Amrop Argentina, admits that this won't be easy. "They belong to their own generation, with its own characteristics."

She compares leadership to a river. The new gen will happily doggy-paddle towards the boss if s/he meets them in the torrent. "It comes with impact, stones, uncertainty, constant movement and learning. The river is never in the same place twice. It is tumultuous, fast-moving." The need for speed surfaces in many ways, including communication styles. Mansour Abdulghaffar, Managing Partner of Amrop Saudi Arabia: "The younger generation is concise. Corporates are verbose. Both sides need to meet in the middle." An executive recently complained to him about having to endure a two-hour weekly regional call. "These small elements of job design matter. They affect how people feel valued."

Another zone in need of generational bridges is neurodiversity. The term first reached a wider audience in the late 1990s. Even if it began to feature in the hiring programs of major corporations in around 2015, it only joined mainstream culture in around 2019.¹ "We must enable executives to be more sensitive to these arising phenomena, and address them in a way that's not perceived as offensive, but supportive and embracing. Not always easy," says Jeff Rosin, Managing Partner of Amrop Rosin in Canada and an Amrop Board Member.

Marko Mlakar, Managing Partner of Amrop Adria, agrees that leaders need to think and behave with extreme care around such issues – at worst, to avoid retaliation. At best, "Managing today is not only about Gen Z, but the whole complexity of a changed world."





Generation Alpha might have 30 jobs in their lifetime. If the average career lifecycle keeps shrinking, how can companies plan talent strategy the way they used to?

Tarunesh Madan, Co-Managing Partner of Amrop India, is confident that some leaders in their early 50s can flex to the new. After all – the business case is undeniable: organizations must be future-fit. “They are clear on the need for more disruptive, younger leaders reporting into them. They are prioritizing what’s right for the organization. On paper, you might say: *here’s a dyed in the wool, legacy leader who will bring some biases*. But they recognize the gaps. They focus on empowering younger leaders, with executive sponsorship to provide an environment in which they succeed. They acknowledge that some of these things don’t come naturally to them. Thinking digital first, for example. And without biases.”

Mind the gaps

Clarisa Vittone sees three core leadership needs: *productivity, ownership, and accountability*: “Do new gen understand what these mean in leadership language? Do leaders understand what they mean in new gen language? It goes both ways.” New gens need to accept prompting, guidance, inspiration and training. Mansour Abdulghaffar agrees: “They need to move closer to what’s acceptable in a corporate environment. At the same time, hiring organizations must realize that the old style is no longer feasible.”

Anna Bonde sees the potential in younger people, but has concerns about their resilience. “It is possible to develop, but they must toughen up and understand that it’s not about them all the time. There’s a degree of egocentricity.” Marko Mlakar sees a particular need to invest in communication competencies and team dynamics. “Technically, everyone will be superb. But social skills will be the differentiator.” Tarunesh Madan agrees – especially given the rise of specialisms and potential silos. “Some skills are not coalescing naturally. They’ll need a lot of hand-holding on interpersonal skills, making trade-offs, being more patient with people and more ruthless on execution. Today, beyond the top job, there are no truly integrated leadership roles. Success comes through collaboration, influencing the moving parts.”

The new gen topic should be considered as a form of risk management, says Tarunesh Madan - a higher order issue. “It means differentiating between a risk and an opportunity. That’s what boards and management councils are for.” İrem Yüksel advises systematic, multi-level cultural reality checks.

Here, too, top management must wade in and reconfigure: “The CHRO role will be more strategic, close to the CEO. It’s about defining culture objectively, reducing turnover and building a psychologically safe, sustainable organization. Learning and development are essential to business objectives. This is not only about culture, but revenue. We’re even seeing CHRO’s moving into CEO positions.”

Blowing in the wind - adapting organization design

New gen talent strategy is an architectural matter. Mansour Abdulghaffar: “Generation Alpha might have 30 jobs in their lifetime. If the career lifecycle keeps shrinking, how can companies plan talent strategy the way they did? How do we keep Gen Z motivated? Mid-caps and large corporates must create an environment where you can retain people long enough for them to become leaders in 10-15 years. That’s when the ROI comes. They have to grow with you.”

Tarunesh Madan adds: “No organization can have only A players – you need strong B players as well. The entire organizational engine must come together. Particularly when the business model significantly converges with technology, younger leaders can build internal credibility. But if you tell them: this is our traditional bureaucratic structure, your role will be housed here, and you’ll report into one senior legacy leader, they disengage.”

For İrem Yüksel, good organization design translates into good leadership. “Psychological safety. Authenticity. A coaching mindset. Preparing the new generation for leadership roles requires role models. High-pressure management is outdated. It paralyzes this generation.”

What's happening to your culture?

A company’s culture and leadership model are also intertwined. Clarisa Vittone systematically asks clients to name their desired culture. Do they see any divergence between that, and the emergent culture the new entrants are generating? “They can describe behaviors - especially among Gen Z - but not yet the culture itself. That is fine. We encourage a discovery mindset.”





When upcoming leaders are asked what they miss if they are physically apart from their role models, the answer is "trust".

Temple or sandcastle? A matter of trust

After post-Covid experiments, most boards now accept that in-person interaction is vital for cultural health (and learning). But cohesion requires two things. One is faith – people need to believe. And loyalty can no longer be assumed. “Multinationals rely on reporting and control. Young people aren’t structured that way,” says Marko Mlakar. “They don’t quietly obey orders. Their loyalty is to their own standards and beliefs. *“The company pays me for 8 hours. If it fits my agenda, fine. But I’m not blindly loyal.”*”

The 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer revealed that 53% of adults aged 18-34 approve of hostile activism (versus 41% of ages 35-54 and 26% of the over 55s). Leaders can expect interrogation from younger employees wanting 'sustainable capitalism', says Mansour Abdulghaffar. “This links to wise leadership. If you focus only on shareholder returns and squeeze margins at the expense of employees, you’ll lose them. It’s important to set parameters. How much challenge do you want in a corporate setting?” Just the right amount of constructive pushback is in the company’s interest. “Many great ideas come from people who ask, *“Why do we do it this way? Why not another way? Why not use AI? Why not simplify?”*”

Room to challenge also builds another cultural adhesive – trust. “If you lower anxiety, you unlock innovation,” says İrem Yüksel. She agrees that the new gen need considerable freedom to share ideas, and that it is now time to banish top-down reporting lines for good. “Leaders should manage from the center, reaching all generations in a diverse way and hearing everyone’s thoughts.”

Trust must be hard-earned. But virtuality is making it difficult. “In person, trust can develop naturally and fast,” says Clarisa Vittone. “A two-hour drive to a manufacturing site, for example, discussing not just business but sentiments.” This spontaneity is hard to replicate on screens. Unplanned moments, informal conversations, shared experiences and real-life stimuli create connections and accelerate learning. “When upcoming leaders are asked what they miss if they are physically apart from their role models, the answer is *“trust.”*”

İrem Yüksel adds: “To build trust, we need to show that we trust them, instead of stereotyping. One way is to give them tasks where they can act like entrepreneurs inside the corporate environment. They are often very creative. When we give them room to implement an idea, they engage far more.”

Like everything else, trust works both ways. “Trust enables everything: commercial deals, leads, references - everything you need for your job,” says Clarisa Vittone. “But without trust, there is no promotion.”





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One of our Gen Z talent advisors is a psychologist and data analyst. He is also quite introverted.

One day, he opened our roundtable by saying that I didn't trust him enough. My first - physical - reaction was surprise. Then my brain immediately started processing: he was brave to name this issue at a table of 8 people - including another partner and all his peers.

I gently encouraged him. I thanked him for sharing a difficult topic, double-checked my understanding, and offered positive reinforcement. Most of all, he appreciated being thanked for his honesty.

I asked: do you feel that remote working, starting with the pandemic at 5 days, and now 2, has made it harder for trust to develop? If this makes you uncomfortable, we can talk another day.

He said, "That's true. And, if you show me more trust, I believe I can show you more of my capabilities."

I told him: "I hear you. This is important. Thank you for sharing. This is new - nobody has said this in any of the roundtables." I encouraged everyone else to reflect on his point, and said I would, too.

If you silence your inner judge and truly ask and listen, remarkable things happen. We need to step down from our learned habits: endlessly talking, motivating, inspiring - and shift from transmitting to listening. Two ears, one mouth. We've also practised gratitude for almost a decade in our firm."

Clarisa Vittone

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The day-to day Implications for managers and leaders

When it comes to the corporate building, organization design, cultural investigations, declarations and strategies form the architecture for what's next. But impact is ultimately created by what happens in the rooms (physical and virtual). In daily interpersonal leadership, what attitudes and practices do executives need to focus on, if they are to ignite new gen's business-building potential? To ensure the future of the organization?



The ideal leader today connects authenticity, psychological safety and social impact. But this doesn't mean ignoring profitability and KPIs. It's about keeping those two worlds coherent.

Let's talk - different dialogues

"Naming an issue is the first step," says Clarisa Vittone. "The biggest problems are prejudice, bias, and deafness. If you meet the new gen, encourage them, and truly listen, things change." It starts with attitude. *"As a leader, how do I want people to feel? What experience do I want them to have with me? How do I want them to leave the conversation? I am responsible for what I generate."* As the saying goes, people don't remember what you said, but how you made them feel.

But dialogue needs to broaden out from narrow individual encounters. In her leadership advisory practice, Clarisa Vittone recommends (and facilitates) frequent, structured group exchanges such as discovery programs and roundtables. Here, participants share their challenges and fears. "We listen with empathy." Mansour Abdulghaffar agrees: "You need to create an environment where the new gen feel heard and understand why they're doing what they're doing." For Irem Yüksel, "The ideal leader today connects authenticity, psychological safety and social impact. But this doesn't mean ignoring profitability and KPIs. It's about keeping those two worlds coherent."

Being real - authenticity and vulnerability

But, for new gens to open up, leaders must take a first step. This may challenge some seasoned players. "We find showing vulnerability difficult, because it's perceived as a weakness. But I believe it's bravery," says Irem Yüksel. "For previous generations, being as unshakable as a rock was the definition of a good leader. But we have a lot on our plates - economically, politically, environmentally, technologically. It's not easy to be unshakable, because it's not true. The solution is to humanize the struggle. You can openly say, "I'm stressed. I'm frustrated." This transparency and empathy allow your team to share their own humanity."

"Authentic leadership will continue to be the way forward" argues Anna Bonde: "Someone who can show their weaknesses and challenges, so younger people understand that it's okay to do so. You can even be authentic about being tough - it's about knowing who you are. Then people accept it when you need to be firm and direct. Stability matters. Leaders need to be compassionate, but also passionate. It's easier, more fun, to follow leaders who transmit passion. And they are generally good at what they do." Gen Z also demands leaders who live their values.



In our last article we saw that new gens seem to seek feedback. But “*please give me feedback*,” often means “*please give me reassurance*.” When it comes to tough love, authentic leaders who show their own vulnerabilities (within reason) have the edge. “People need to trust that feedback comes from an honest place. This authenticity fosters psychological safety.”

Getting things done - structured autonomy

Authenticity, listening, dialogues, freedom and entrepreneurship. Do we risk turning the business arena into a chaotic, bouncy castle? How do we ensure inexperienced employees meet their KPIs, especially when they demand autonomy?

“I sometimes talk with people about the difference between being functional and effective. “*I can multitask and do it effectively. So, why don't you just let me do what I can do?*” I understand that.” says Jeff Rosin. Earlier, Clarisa Vittone summarized three core leadership needs: *productivity, ownership, and accountability*. What are the implications?

“When new gens have entrepreneurial opportunities where they feel like owners, the output is incredible,” says İrem Yüksel. For Tarunesh Madan, a regimented monolith will stifle them. “They bring a certain intensity to their roles, but the engagement drops if you create a set framework and expect them to operate solely within that, without any say in how the work gets done.” He does not advocate for a totally free hand – impossible in a large organization. Instead, it's about clear operating zones, within which people have autonomy. “For this generation, outcomes matter, but defining *how* to arrive there doesn't resonate well with them. They want to figure out their own way of delivering.”

This requires setting clear outcomes – re-emphasizing the need for feedback and dialogue. “They may disagree, but they need to know your thinking. This means having straight discussions, setting crystal clear priorities and explicitly telling them that they must own the agenda and be accountable. Then they will strike to make it happen.”

Coaching and mentoring - a win-win

When it comes to activating new gens' leadership potential, coaching and mentoring are powerful and mutually enriching. They are focused and individualized. Both need intention, skill and method. Many larger firms offer formal leadership development programs. But these two daily practices are often overlooked.

“We always ask our clients: “*What does your 2026 competency model look like?*” Some encourage coaching as a core skill,” says Clarisa Vittone. “We speak daily with top tier boards and senior management. Our message is: develop as a coach. Articulate your ideal vision of the new gen, and reconcile it with who they really are. Coaching is not only about listening, but also detecting and voicing gaps.”

Leaders who undergo training in coaching also improve their self-awareness. Consider the need to calmly field disruptive challenges from new gen objectors without over-identifying: “5 years ago I might have reacted defensively. Not now. Through leadership experience, I have learned that coaching is essential.”

Reverse mentoring typically means younger generations guide older leaders through digital change and new gen perspectives. Amrop Partners also call for *mutual mentoring*. Anna Bonde has been a mentor in Amrop's global program for many years. “New gens lack experience and knowledge, but we shouldn't push them down. We need to challenge them and help them gain the knowledge they need. Mutual inter-generational mentoring ensures that a 55-year-old still has value. They exercise their brains digitally and creatively, while helping the younger generation move into leadership roles more quickly.” She believes her home country of Sweden needs more formal mentorships, “between the generation soon to be pushed out of the job market and the one trying to get in.”

What characterizes a good mentor? “Open-mindedness. A good communicator. The ability to inspire, be a role model, and transfer knowledge without patronizing. Seniors need to show a little humility toward the younger generation and what they bring.”

Jeff Rosin also calls for more formal mentoring initiatives: “where you are focused on your key successors, their potential gaps, and how to bridge those. Many companies are doing it around succession planning, but it is even more important to figure out how to truly develop that next cohort, and expose them to different things than what they are being exposed to in their peer group.”

Again, trust is of the essence, Anna Bonde advises. “Don't see it as just another task in your busy day. Put your ego aside. You'll need engagement and two big ears. The new gen needs to be willing to share openly, so the mentor benefits too. You need to be a bit daring. It can feel uncomfortable to tell someone twice your age, “*have you thought of it this way?*”” İrem Yüksel agrees. “If you do it just to tick a KPI box, new gens know it. They can smell the fake. You need to genuinely believe in it.”

Anna Bonde also recommends mentoring across divisions, or even organizations. “We've seen exchanges between large corporations - IKEA, Carlsberg, IBM - almost like trainee programs. I once placed a young candidate at IKEA who spent months rotating across companies. It gave him a fantastic start.”



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The outlook

Is business safe in new gen hands?

Anna Bonde always looks at how the generations can balance each other. “We can learn a lot from each other - ambition, behavior, career expectations. There are many similarities; we tend to focus on the differences.” Clarisa Vittone has a similar view. “People want to work, evolve, earn money, feel good about themselves. Purpose matters to Gen X and Gen Z alike. There are many shared values. So let’s avoid an “us versus them” mindset.”

Tarunesh Madan agrees that the fundamentals are similar between generations. “I don’t see a different belief system there.”

For İrem Yüksel, generations working in sync are the ultimate definition of diversity. “A great leader sees the light traits of the new gen, and doesn’t obsess over the shadow, by labeling them as lazy or spoiled, for example. Instead of stereotyping, leaders must objectively and empathetically seek solutions.”



We talk about this privately. How on earth will they take over after us? I’m sure our parents thought the same.

“We talk about this privately,” says Anna Bonde: “*How on earth will they take over after us?*” I’m sure our parents thought the same.” Leaders can choose how they view the new gen – informed and reassured by the lessons of history. “We’ve managed generational gaps before. Learning from each other and installing action plans will create a domino effect.” Mansour Abdulghaffar concurs. “I’m confident both sides will make the right conscious decisions. After all, the train left the station long ago. But adaptation must happen on both sides of the equation. It’s not fair to only question current leaders.” All need to step up to future realities. “If a company continues to exist, one day its Chair will once have been a Gen Z.” İrem Yüksel is already looking beyond the current cohorts. “I have two Alphas at home. They’re fair and empathetic. We need to ensure Gen Z can manage Gen Alpha in the near future.”

The Chair is a prime example of a role that calls for considerable emotional intelligence. In preparing new gens for the big seats, Anna Bonde calls for discernment. “We need to focus on differences as well, to ensure people are ready.” Clarisa Vittone adds: “You will not mold them into your own mirror image - and that’s good.”

It will take time

“Our C-suite clients have Zoomers in their teams, but they are not yet leaders,” says Anna Bonde. Jeff Rosin adds: “It’s going to take a generation of putting people into roles, challenging them, seeing how they perform, and having them mentor others who could step up more readily than they did. That takes a long time.”

Corporate systems and processes mean that talent takes longer to grow into leadership roles than it might elsewhere. Will enough new gens stay the course? And what happens to the firm’s legacy if they don’t? “They have to grow through checks and balances,” warns Mansour Abdulghaffar. “If they leave, the company loses institutional memory, which is hard to replace overnight.”

Multinationals could once rely on bright young minds patiently scaling formal career ladders. As we have repeatedly seen, high potentials may be more interested in lively start-ups. Are weighty giants going the way of the dinosaurs? Will the future business landscape be a fragmented world, dominated by smaller, nimble (and short-lived) organisms?



The new landscape

Tarunesh Madan is hopeful. Life finds a way. Just as today's junior could be tomorrow's Chair, today's start-up can become tomorrow's mid-cap. Abundant capital and the ability to execute at speed mean scale-up is easier than it has ever been.

"It once took a decade to build a meaningful business model. But the next gen is willing to challenge those assumptions. Their starting point is: *"we can figure out a way of doing this in 4 years."* They are set apart by conviction, ability, the confidence to work it out as they go."

One factor powering scale-up is, of course, AI. "Companies aren't adapting fast enough," warns Mansour Abdulghaffar. "They may need to redesign entire jobs. AI integration is accelerating. Singularity - AGI - may come. When AI becomes as capable as humans, we'll have to rethink everything."



It once took a decade to build a meaningful business model. But the next gen is willing to challenge those assumptions. We can figure out a way of doing this in 4 years. They are set apart by conviction, ability, the confidence to work it out as they go.

The generational handover is already in motion, but it is neither a crisis nor a mystery. It is a long, iterative process of exposure, challenge, calibration and, above all, mutual learning. Amrop Partners reject caricatures and fatalism, in favor of shared human drivers. Yes, differences matter; they shape readiness, pace, and the skills required for roles like the Chair. But similarities matter just as much, anchoring collaboration rather than division.

What emerges is a pragmatic optimism. New gens must grow into responsibility; established leaders must adapt their assumptions and redesign systems built for another era. Companies must find ways to retain talent long enough for wisdom to accumulate, while also embracing the entrepreneurial energy fueling today's start ups and tomorrow's scale ups. And all must prepare for an AI accelerated landscape that will redraw job design, leadership models, and the very architecture of organizations.

If there is a single throughline, it is this: generational transition succeeds when each cohort chooses curiosity over judgment. When leaders see potential rather than shadows. When younger professionals step up rather than out. And when organizations create the conditions for both to thrive.

Do that, and the future will not be defined by generational divides, but by the strength of the bridges between them.



About the contributors

This series is based on in-person interviews with the following Amrop Managing Partners.



Mansour Abdulghaffar
Managing Partner, Saudi Arabia



Anna Bonde
Managing Partner, Sweden



Tarunesh Madan
Co-Managing Partner, India



Marko Mlakar
Managing Partner, Adria



Jeff Rosin
Managing Partner, Canada,
Amrop Global Board Member



Clarisa Vittone
Managing Partner, Argentina



İrem Yüksel
Managing Partner, Türkiye & CIS

References

¹ When Did Neurodivergent Become a Thing? Scienceinsights, March 7, 2026.

Further reading from Amrop

Bridging the Generation Gap. Who are your leaders for what's next? (2026).

Bridging the Generation Gap. The new contract (2026).

The CEO Struggle (series, 2026)

I Am Not A Robot (series, 2026)



About Amrop

The Amrop Partnership is a premium leadership and executive search consultancy with 72 offices in 59 countries and a global team of more than 550 professionals.

We help our clients find and develop Leaders For What's Next.

Shaping sustainable success is our mission, craft and passion.

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