

Bridging the Generation Gap

The new
executive
contract



Amrop

Leaders For What's Next

The new executive contract

In our last article, we asked: beyond the hype, which new gen characteristics deserve special attention?

Now we examine new gen career expectations, and essential hiring strategies to identify the motivations and competences of the Leaders for What's Next.



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

Ages: Gen Z: 20-26 | Young millennials: 27-34 | Old millennials: 35-42 | Gen X: 43-60



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New avenues

Founded in 2016 by two young brothers, Omar Alolayan and Abdulrahman Alolayan, NICE ONE is an online beauty e-commerce platform. It has swiftly grown to be one of Saudi Arabia's largest players in its sector, serving customers across the GCC region. "When the company went public in 2025, both founders - still in their 20s - became billionaires in Saudi riyals," says Mansour Abdulghaffar, Managing Partner of Amrop in Saudi Arabia. For one IT graduate who had joined in the firm's early days, this was a defining moment. His stock options were suddenly worth around 7 million euros. "At 27 years old, he has financial security, can buy a house, save for retirement, and still build his career."

Zepto, the ultra-fast grocery delivery startup from India, was launched in 2021 by Aadit Palicha and Kaivalya Vohra, two 19-year-old Stanford students. It reached unicorn status in its first year. By 2025, it was valued at \$7 billion.¹

Gymshark, a fitness apparel and accessories company, rose from its humble beginnings in a garage to a global sportswear brand, today with an estimated value of over \$1.3 billion.² Ben Francis, who was 19 when he formed its first iteration in 2012, is one of the youngest leaders to have transitioned into a corporate-scale CEO role with formal executive leadership, governance, and multinational operations.

Meanwhile, Melanie Perkins, the co-founder of online design platform Canva, was only in her mid-20s when she launched the concept in 2013. Within five years, aged 30, she was hailed as one of tech's youngest female CEOs.³ After repeated rejections before securing backing, Canva quickly evolved into a multimillion dollar organization. In 2025, the two co-founders launched an employee share sale valuing the company at \$42 billion.⁴

In his mid-30s, Muhannad Al Salhi is CEO of Engel & Völkers Italy, an established real-estate multinational. He first came to public notice as a finalist in the Italian version of The Apprentice in 2013, and five years later entered the London property industry.⁵



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This generation is not afraid of quitting a linear path and going after their true conviction. Mid-careers, they have moved away and started off on their own.

Tarunesh Madan | Co-Managing Partner, India



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Reasons why

Keys to attracting and retaining new gen talent.

Meaning



The new gen seeks purpose, according to Deloitte: 8 out of 10 Gen Zs and millennials say it is important for job satisfaction, wellbeing and loyalty. They will likely reject organizations that misalign with their beliefs. In another recent study from Adobe in the US, 78% of Gen Zs stressed the importance of connecting with company values.

Money



In 2024, a global Amrop study, *'The Meaning of Work,'* compared the views of Gen Z and millennials with those of Gen X. Even if financial success and wealth were less important for the next gen than health and wellness or family, they did rate material factors higher than Gen X. Deloitte found that around a 3rd of Gen Zs and millennials are financially insecure, with 6 out of 10 living "paycheck-to-paycheck."

Learning



New gen members want to grow – rapidly. According to Adobe, 48% of Gen Z want more training on hard skills, 33% on soft skills. And Deloitte found that beyond work/life balance, learning and development opportunities sat next to pay as the top three attractors for Gen Z and millennials.

Freedom



Start-ups are a tempting alternative employment option. Amrop found a strong appetite for building entrepreneurial ventures across age groups. Flexibility is the main factor influencing the current employment choices of just over 20% of all cohorts – including Gen Z and millennials. Around 4 out of 10 new gens will likely have a side job, Deloitte research reveals.

Leadership



Amrop found that Gen Z show the strongest interest of all generations in climbing the ladder. Around a third of Gen Z and millennials are willing to work overtime to move up, versus 26% of Gen X. The Adobe study confirmed this appetite for ascension: 70% of Gen Z are eager to grow into the C-suite.

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Motivators

A digital new normal, with information flows and communication modes driven by social media. A challenging environment of financial crises, terrorism, political uncertainty, climate change. Education and early careers disrupted by the global pandemic. A world in which the classic continuum from university campus to office water cooler is no longer the automatic choice – or in some cases – option. What really drives the new gen? And does the modern organization have any chance of meeting their needs?

Meaning

Why do you get up in the morning? Why do you do what you do? Amrop has long argued that individual purpose is integral to leadership: purposeful pilots can more compellingly embody the purpose of the organization. For the next generation of top navigators, a true north will be just as important – if not more so. Not only does an individual purpose directly serve the firm's business interests and reputation, it boosts resilience. Purposeful executives can more easily set boundaries – deciding what to accept, reject, or postpone in a flood of information, opinions and demands.

Fortunately, the next generation of leaders is indeed a purposeful one. 8 out of 10 Gen Zs and millennials say that purpose is important for their job satisfaction, wellbeing and loyalty.⁶ Moreover, they are increasingly likely to reject organizations who misalign with their beliefs. This is borne out by another recent study from Adobe in the US.⁷ Here, 78% of Gen Zs stressed the importance of connecting with company values. And around half of early career starters want to work for a socially aware company. "You win them with purpose," confirms İrem Yüksel, Managing Partner of Amrop Türkiye and the CIS.

Money

But noble ideals don't pay the rent. Alongside the quest for meaning (and contrary to popular mythology), the next gen wants a healthy bank balance. Fair compensation is especially vital in today's harsh and unpredictable economic environment. The quest for enrichment is reinforced by the glowing stories of young billionaires that stream into social media feeds. And, as we saw in our last article, financial constraints are just one reason driving many next gen members away from costly and burdensome university courses. Particularly as the return on investment isn't guaranteed.

In 2024, a global Amrop study⁸ compared the views of the next gen (Gen Z and millennials) with those of Gen X. Even if financial success and wealth were less important for the next gen than health and wellness or family, they did place higher importance on these quantifiables than Gen X. Deloitte found that around a third of Gen Zs and millennials are financially insecure, with six out of ten living "paycheck-to-paycheck". The cost of living remains - by far - their top concern over other factors, such as climate change. "In the past, corporate life offered more compensation," says İrem Yüksel. "You could work hard and play hard. But now, Gen Z work hard just to survive. They don't have savings for the future."





They perceive that in corporate life they will work hard and still not save anything.

Learning

New gen members have an eye on several horizons. One is the desire to grow – rapidly. “Their learning path is faster,” says Marko Mlakar, Managing Partner of Amrop Adria. “What will you do to develop my skills? What opportunities will I have once I demonstrate results?” “Their learning velocity has come through nicely,” agrees Tarunesh Madan, Co-Managing Partner of Amrop India. According to Adobe, 48% of Gen Z want more training on hard skills, 33% on soft skills. And Deloitte found that beyond work/life balance, learning and development opportunities sat next to pay as the top three attractors for Gen Z and millennials. Other factors, such as a positive workplace culture, flexible working hours, career progression, and meaningful work followed closely behind. “Leaders should give the new gen the opportunity to learn what they want - or what they don’t want. They’ll see other cultures, and if they come back, they’ll be more permanent,” says İrem Yüksel.

Freedom and entrepreneurship

Financial pressure – and new gen’s understandable response to it - have undeniable implications for hiring organizations. Far from driving people towards the (apparent) safe haven of the monthly pay check, this pressure is having the opposite effect on many. “They don’t necessarily want to work 20 years to reach the C-suite,” says İrem Yüksel. “They’re looking for ways to earn money more easily and quickly. Corporate life feels too old-school.” “They are unwilling to play company politics,” adds Marko Mlakar.

In 2014, a global study conducted by Amrop and IMD⁹ explored the human dimension of globalizing mid-caps – as seen by their leaders. We found distinctively high levels of freedom, connectivity and C-suite stewardship in these organizations, compared to their larger rivals. Such enviable markers once gave mid-caps an edge in the competition for young talent. But today, they are increasingly competing with VC-funded startups. Firms that survive their first perilous years offer seductive benefits, says Mansour Abdulghaffar, such as “life-changing stock options, and a dynamic culture. Rising costs mean life will only get harder. Many want side hustles. If the day job demands more than 9–5, it eats into that. So, either you pay more, or they stop at 5pm to go home, eat, and work on their side project - an AI app or consulting, for example. Career development and job design will need to reflect this.”

Not only are flourishing start-ups a tempting alternative employment option for the new gen, the Amrop study also confirmed a strong appetite for building entrepreneurial ventures themselves. This spanned age groups, with interest peaking in India (76%) and Brazil (66%). And, if people in other markets were rather less enthusiastic (around half in China, the US and the UK, a third in France and Germany), it means that a significant minority of new gen are probably thinking outside of the corporate tramlines. “Entrepreneurial ideas offer purpose and the possibility of success - and potentially wealth - much faster,” confirms İrem Yüksel. “They perceive that in corporate life they will work hard and still not save anything.”

“I wondered if I could establish a company, create a business plan, and have an operational company in one day,” muses Marko Mlakar. “With AI tools, I did background research, created a business plan, and built a website on a platform where you simply enter prompts. I then bought a domain, and connected automation tools that pitched to B2B clients without me being present. Today’s tools allow you to do things quickly and cheaply.”

Joining or building a start-up are just two options for the new gen. Another is to run more than one job. Asked by Amrop to identify the top two influences on their current choice of employment, flexibility was the main driver for just over 20% of all age groups – including Gen Z and millennials. Driven mainly by the need to supplement income, the Deloitte survey found that both cohorts will likely have a side job (45% of Gen Zs and 36% of millennials). Examples include selling products or services online, flexible “gig” work such as ridesharing or food delivery, artistic ventures, restaurant or retail work, or consulting/running their own businesses. Mansour Abdulghaffar foresees an exponential rise in the trend: “It will likely double until you reach the gig economy, where people don’t have “jobs” anymore, they have a project here, an assignment there.” The trend will only be reinforced as AI continues to re-shape the landscape, and humans focus on what AI can’t (yet) do.

Whatever their origins, these pressures and opportunities converge on one big outcome – job churn. In India, Tarunesh Madan sees that even successful young corporate professionals are on the move: “This generation is not afraid of quitting a linear path and going after their true conviction. Mid-career, they have started off on their own.”





The playing field is now more level between employer and employee. If it's not working out, they're happy to move on.

Career options

We could increasingly see the business arena as an expansive network - people move in and out. Not only do many new gen members have a propensity to job switch, they can, thanks to information access and fewer anchors. "They don't necessarily own homes, so they're not tied to a location," says Mansour Abdulghaffar. This further ramps up the pressure on hiring organizations: "The playing field is now more level between employer and employee. If it's not working out, they're happy to move on." Under the weight of financial obligations and real estate, executives were once reluctant to move. "It's okay" was enough. Today, "okay" isn't enough.

Tarunesh Madan sees this as a significant opportunity for hiring organizations – if they take the right measures. "Free-thinking and open-mindedness allow the new gen to take a leap of faith and go into directions which the previous generation would have normally hesitated to do. That's a fundamental strength. If organizations can channel that, it can create some massive unlocks."

İrem Yüksel agrees that career design can - and should - play to new gen strengths. This is the future of work. "Maybe not a vertical career ladder, but more horizontal, rotational paths, extra tasks, or intrapreneurial opportunities alongside their standard job description. Or allowing them to work for an additional organization. If it's known from the beginning and someone can allocate their time - two days here, three days there - they can have multiple assignments and serve different companies." She admits that it won't be simple. "This is not the standard. It's also fiscally complicated. Still, it's a good way to keep organizations lean: you bring people in for the tasks you need, and they can use their time more freely to improve their skills and earn more."

The best of both worlds, then? The need for alternative, flexible career models must not slide into role ambiguity, warns Tarunesh Madan. "If new gen don't get upfront clarity and comfort around how a role is going to operate, how things will be prioritized, what career opportunities will be earned, the engagement drops significantly."

İrem Yüksel signals that leaders should see these developments as a wake-up call. Career design doesn't need light tinkering. It needs genuine systemic change. "Otherwise, in 10 years, we won't have any leaders or managers. The objective is not to change the new gen, but to understand how to use their strengths, improve their motivation, and give them a purpose that allows them to dream about a future in corporate life."

Leadership aspirations

Short tenures, side gigs, start-ups – does the new gen even want corporate leadership roles? Of the four cohorts it surveyed, Amrop's research found that Gen Z show the strongest interest in climbing the ladder. And, contrary to stereotypes of laziness, around a third of Gen Z and millennials are willing to work overtime to progress, versus 26% of Gen X. The Adobe study confirmed this appetite for leadership: 70% of Gen Z are eager to grow into the C-suite. Echoing Tarunesh Madan's emphasis on career visibility, 50% ranked "no clear path to promotion" as one of the top reasons they would leave a job.





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The next gen are willing to lead. But are they able? In our last article, we reported on some negative effects of the virtual environment on cognitive and communication skills. “When we assess leadership potential, it’s interesting to see their perceptions about their ability,” says Anna Bonde, Managing Partner of Amrop in Sweden. “With age and experience, you realize that you will always keep learning as a leader. But when we interview these newcomers, they are generally very confident. They haven’t been challenged as leaders - yet.” In other words, they don’t know what they don’t know – just as Aristotle suggested. But the new gen hardly have the monopoly on over-confidence. “Even within my own generation, people say, “I’m the perfect leader, I score 10 out of 10,” and I always answer, “That’s not possible.” We will always evolve and develop as leaders.”

Millennials are already candidates for leadership roles. How does she raise their self-awareness? “I say: “You think you’re a leader? Maybe you are. Tell me what you believe a leader does.” And then we explore what strengths to build on, or gaps to compensate for.” Mansour Abdulghaffar has a similar tactic: “I might ask: “What do you think a leadership role involves?” How would you handle a team meeting where everyone objects to your idea? Build consensus? It could be useful to challenge them back: “You think you’re ready - why? Ready for what?” When someone says, “I’m ready,” they often see what they want to see. They’re good at certain aspects, but neglect others they don’t value. If they can’t master those, someone senior must step in during meetings. And that defeats the purpose of promotion. Reaching that level takes time.”

Jeff Rosin is Managing Partner of Amrop Rosin in Canada. He also observes that some new gen members think the corporate elevator should propel them to the top floor more quickly than it did their predecessors. “Whilst there is some merit to that, there is no substitute for the experience that builds credibility, gravitas and perspective. There is the notion that they should be doing what people 15 to 20 years senior are doing, but that they’ve earned the right to do it today.”

Once again, the culprit for these misconceptions is never far away. For Mansour Abdulghaffar, social media amplifies unrealistic expectations about what life should look like. AI accelerates information access, processing and skill acquisition. “What used to take days now takes minutes. So they ask: “If I can do this job faster and better, why am I not promoted? Why have I been doing the same tasks for three years? I deserve a promotion.”



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Hiring

Digital. Impatient. Wary. Dynamic. Freethinking and aspirational. In our previous article we surfaced some distinctive new gen characteristics related to the unique context in which they have developed. All have upside potential for the future leadership of organizations, given the right talent strategies. In this article, we have unpacked the motivators, needs and inclinations of new gen members when it comes to their career expectations. How do these findings play out in the executive hiring arena?

Deliberation and exploration

Two main hiring axes emerged from our interviews with the Amrop Partners. The first is *deliberation* – consciously and objectively crafting a hiring strategy before the candidate market is even mapped. It is accompanied by *exploration* – uncovering the true facets of each individual.

This combination means checking the candidate's deepest motivations and their alignment with the organization. Ensuring that the interviewer's understanding of those motivations is based on reality, not assumptions. Why? The research and anecdotal evidence suggest that each generation has salient preferences, (linear versus portfolio careers, slow and steady trajectories versus fast tracking). But no generation is uniform. Each is made up of singular human points on a wide spectrum. This makes it critical to objectively evaluate a candidate not as a symbol or a stereotype, but as an individual.

But new gen also risk stereotyping themselves. The tendency to curate their online image (often with the help of an enthusiastic and normative AI) intensifies the need for deep detection. Executive search practitioners must continue to rigorously deploy their most powerful instruments. First, the in-depth, in-person interview. Second psychometric testing. This vital combination of humanity and data must be compassionately and responsibly deployed. After all, the stakes are high. As Mansour Abdulghaffar puts it: "When you hire someone at a mid- or large cap, you're not just filling today's seat. You're assessing whether this person can be a future leader."



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Deliberation

Clarisa Vittone is the Managing Partner of Amrop in Argentina, and a new gen advocate. “We encourage our clients to adopt a proactive and brave attitude to explore what is happening with this challenging new generation. In every talent meeting, the topic inevitably becomes part of the conversation. If the client does not bring it up - especially in succession planning - we do.

“We integrate the new gen into every project: search assignments, onboarding, and development programs where we are asked for our perspective. So, when a client asks us to address this generation, we are ready.

“It’s fascinating to consciously hold the thought: “How do I want a candidate to leave an interview?” They should feel inspired, stimulated, heard. Even if they don’t get what they want, they should understand why. The interaction should be agile, enjoyable, human. I want people to want to talk openly with me - because if they don’t, Amrop is not well represented.”

“We should spend more time defining strategies,” adds Anna Bonde. “First, assess your organization objectively. Sometimes clients describe the candidate persona they seek, but it fits who they want to be, not who they really are. We must first define the cultural realities of the organization, then define where we want to go, and what type of leaders we need. Not the ‘best’ characteristics, but the ones that fit that path. This requires a strategic mindset across all functions - not only HR. The CEO must also be involved. It takes time, not a two-day workshop.”

Do organizations really need a reality check? As pointed out in our last article, Clarisa Vittone asks leadership candidates what younger employees would say about them. “People imagine what might be said, but usually they’ve never asked.” İrem Yüksel joins her colleagues in inviting organizations to resist the need for speed. “We need to spend more time in the hiring process - not a one-hour interview and then a decision. It’s a journey. Even when we know who will be a good fit, we sometimes spend three or four months on the process. The candidate also needs to assess whether the organization is a good fit for them. They need to learn the targets, leadership style, culture.” Jeff Rosin agrees. “If I see value in an exploration which will double my time with a candidate, I will do it. There’s too much risk of a mis-hire by not doing the process justice and spending the requisite amount of time with an individual.”

Exploration

A candidate will likely curate their image online. But a live deep dive will uncover the gritty reality. “It’s not easy to fake,” says İrem Yüksel. And as digital savviness dominates candidate profiles, it’s vital to go beyond technical formulae to social and leadership skills, says Marko Mlakar.

Jeff Rosin often talks with clients about the different lenses through which his team look at people - subjective and objective. “My point of view on a candidate is based on meeting their peers in the market every day, cross-comparing people in similar roles, in similar-sized organizations. I get a sense of their working experiences. These are table stakes. We pre-screen on those before I meet them. But when I’m interviewing, it’s around all those other interesting nuances.”

To find those nuances, interviewing technique needs to shift. “Checking for the qualities we’re looking for requires more situational, than traditional, interviewing. You have to pose questions, describe contexts where they’ve had to deal with challenging moments that are important to your client, understanding how they dealt with it, what the learnings were, and how they drove forward.

Candidate self-declarations reinforce the need for another core task: “I emphasize reference checking more than anything else. It has to be done by the most senior people: not only listening for what is said, but for what’s not being said, interpreting and probing where need be. That’s a subjective lens.”

Psychometric assessments act as objective lenses: “You get pointers of where else you might want to probe. You have to combine subjective and objective perspectives in your ultimate conclusion of someone’s viability for a leadership role.” Several instruments were born in the first half of the 20th century. Hogan and the OPQ arose in the 1980s. Should they evolve to deal with new gen minds? İrem Yüksel is confident that the existing tools are fit for purpose. “We can see most of the relevant traits, including resilience and leadership style. They’re also good tools for interviews, because you can dig deeper into the traits you want to understand. When you ask for life experiences or run simulations, you can assess further still. Needs vary by sector and culture, the company’s challenges. Some assessments show the shadow and the potential.”

“Each tool tells a story, but you do need to look at people differently,” says Jeff Rosin. “Perhaps through that generational lens.”

In our final article exploring the new gen, we look at the ways in which today’s leaders need to adapt to bring out the best in their successors and ask: are organizations safe in new gen hands?



About the contributors

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



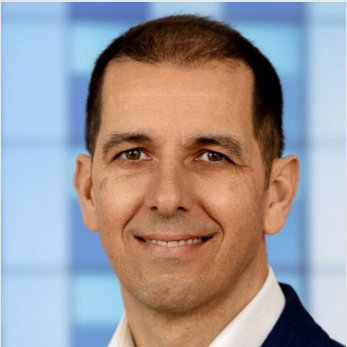
Mansour Abdulghaffar
Managing Partner, Saudi Arabia



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

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Further reading from Amrop

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





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.

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