



Misk مسك
مؤسسة محمد بن سلمان
Mohammed Bin Salman
Foundation

Equipped for Success

Tools and Strategies for Youth Leaders in
Decision-Making Roles

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Empowering the Leaders of the Future Begins Now

In an increasingly interconnected yet complex world, bold and effective leadership has never been more critical. Today's youth bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and an innate drive for change. However, mere access to decision-making spaces does not automatically translate into influence. True impact requires equipping young leaders with the right tools, supportive systems, and opportunities to lead with purpose.

This report, co-developed by the Mohammed Bin Salman Foundation (Misk) and Oliver Wyman, addresses this pressing challenge. Drawing on Misk's 2024 Global Youth Index (GYI) a comprehensive survey of over 41,000 young people across 40 countries it highlights key insights into youth aspirations, concerns, and readiness to lead. These findings have informed actionable recommendations for youth striving to create change and for established leaders committed to fostering environments where young talent can thrive.

At Misk, empowering youth is not just a mission, it is a promise.

Through initiatives such as Youth Voice, the Misk Fellowship, and the GYI, we ensure young people are not only present in leadership conversations but are empowered to drive meaningful change.

Oliver Wyman shares this vision. Addressing society's most complex challenges requires cross-generational collaboration. As a global leader in business and policy, we are committed to amplifying the contributions of young leaders, ensuring their voices shape the future.

Methodology

Aside from desk research, scientific papers and expert input, this report is based on the analysis of MISK's 2024 Global Youth Index (GYI), a survey of over 41,000 participants aged 18–30 across 40 countries. This extensive survey captured what matters most to youth today, from political participation and career readiness to the challenges they find most pressing. Leveraging these insights, the report distills key learnings and crafts clear, actionable recommendations for the two groups best positioned to drive change: young leaders and established leaders. With tailored advice for each, the report is structured to address the needs and perspectives of each group, with targeted recommendations designed to help each rise to the challenge.

MISK, as an institution founded by a global leader to champion youth empowerment, recognizes its unique role in fostering collaboration between young and seasoned leaders. United, both parties can build a future that is resilient, innovative, and inclusive. This report serves as a roadmap, guiding leaders of all ages to work together toward a shared vision — one where the energy and ideas of young people meet the experience and wisdom of those who came before.

Together, they can shape a legacy of lasting impact, built on trust, respect, and a shared commitment to progress.



Transforming Youth Presence into Genuine Influence

Youth participation in decision-making has grown significantly over recent years, with programs like the United Nations Youth Delegate Programme paving the way. Since its inception in 2010 at the UN's 65th General Assembly, where only 7 delegates took part, youth participation rose to 63 at the 78th session in 2023. In total, the 90 member states have welcomed almost 1000 youth delegate participants as of 2024¹, reflecting a global push to integrate youth perspectives into critical conversations.

While these developments signal progress, they mask a deeper issue: genuine impact of youth in decision-making settings remains limited. Many young leaders express frustration over “token participation” — being invited to the table but excluded from meaningful decision-making. A report by the UN General Secretary highlights that youth contributions often go unheard, with their insights sought only after major decisions are finalized. Even in forward-thinking spaces like the Economic and Social Council Youth Forum, youth contributions frequently fail to translate

into tangible outcomes. This disconnection leaves young leaders feeling sidelined, even as they step into roles meant to shape the future.

Misk's Global Youth Index (GYI) 2024 underscores this gap. While youth visibility in leadership is increasing, only 35% of respondents felt somewhat prepared to lead, and a striking 21% felt they were not prepared at all. Education disparities further intensify this challenge, as 67% of postgraduate-educated youth feel equipped for leadership, compared to just 23% of those with compulsory education. These findings point to a critical need: youth must be equipped not only with a seat at the table, but with the skills, resources, and structures to turn presence into impact.

This is particularly the case because young leaders bring something uniquely valuable to high-stake decision settings: fresh perspectives. Their ability to question entrenched norms, introduce innovative ideas, and drive forward-thinking policies is critical for addressing the challenges of the future.

Initiatives like Generation Unlimited (supported by the UN and UNICEF), the European Union's youth programs, and New Zealand's Ministry for Youth Development highlight the transformative power of youth participation.² Incorporating youth perspectives complements those of seasoned leaders, resulting in balanced, inclusive policies that reflect the needs of all stakeholders. Their involvement fosters a sense of belonging and ownership, strengthening communities and laying the foundation for resilience.

Youth participation is not merely a symbolic gesture — it is an investment in the future. The decisions made today will shape the world young people will inherit. By including youth meaningfully, it is ensured that policies are not only reflective of current needs but also sustainable for generations to come.

This report is a guide for leaders — young and established alike — to invest in the leaders of

tomorrow by equipping them with the tools they need today. It provides actionable insights and global examples, addressing three key areas: fostering cultural awareness to navigate diverse global settings, building essential skills for youth leadership success, and implementing systems and resources that empower youth to create meaningful impact. Whether you are a young leader aiming to amplify your voice or an established leader working to empower the next generation, this report offers actionable insights, global examples, and practical strategies to bridge the gap between representation and influence, ensuring youth can actively shape their future.

To begin this journey, the report sheds light on the cultural dynamics and biases that shape how youth leaders are perceived. Cultural factors often perpetuate the tokenization of youth, limiting their ability to fully engage and influence outcomes. By addressing these biases, we can lay the foundation for more inclusive and impactful leadership.



Developing Cultural Awareness

Overcoming Perceptions of Inexperience in Leadership

A crucial factor when trying to de-code the paradox of youth becoming more involved yet having limited influence is age bias and the widespread perception of inexperience. Recent studies clearly demonstrate negative bias against young leaders that make it harder for them to succeed.³ According to researcher Stéphane Francioli, youth is typically associated with beauty, athleticism, and mental sharpness. However, at the same time young adults are often subject to condescension, stereotyping, and even outright discrimination. This bias, known as “youngism,” stems from the belief that today’s youth do not meet the standards set by previous generations at the same age.⁴ These misleading perceptions often result in the contributions of young leaders being undervalued or dismissed, regardless of their potential.

Adding to the international research, Misk’s report “Enabling Youth-Led Positive Social Impact” 2023, shed light on this difficult situation for young leaders. The report highlighted that established leaders often view discipline and focus as the most critical mindsets for youth to drive social

change. Ironically, these are also the traits leaders believe youth most lack, a vivid testament to youngism.

As a result, young leaders face a double challenge: not only do they have to navigate the complexities of leadership, but they must also contend with mistrust from their older counterparts, which often limits the weight their contributions carry in decision-making settings.

At the core of this issue is the link between culture and perception. Cultural norms and values heavily influence how different generations perceive one another, often reinforcing biases that shape leadership dynamics. These cultural frameworks play a central role in how young leaders are tokenized — offered a seat at the table without the genuine opportunity to contribute or influence outcomes. To dismantle this cycle, it is essential to challenge and change how youth are perceived by established leaders, paving the way for genuine inclusion and impact.

Addressing this challenge, the following will explore how culture shapes perception and creates barriers that limit youth leadership. By understanding and navigating these cultural dynamics, young leaders and their established counterparts can work together to break the tokenization cycle and build meaningful collaboration.

The Role of Culture in Shaping Perception

Culture is one of the primary factors that influence how individuals perceive others. Defined by the American Psychological Association as “a set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize an institution, organization, or group” (APA Dictionary of Psychology), culture influences communication styles, social norms, decision-making processes, and more. These factors collectively determine how we perceive the potential and capabilities of others, particularly in leadership contexts.

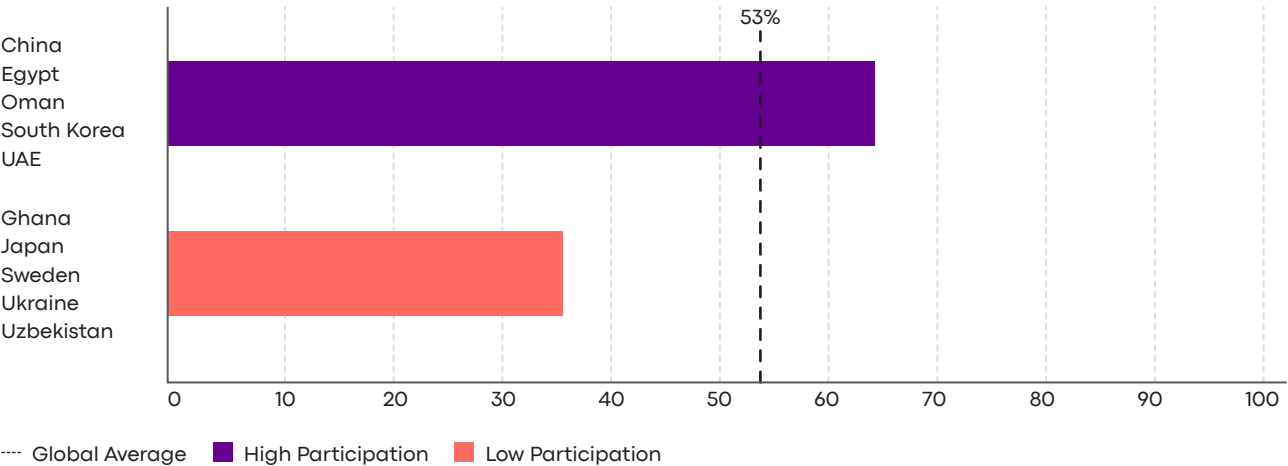
In today’s globalized world, the importance of cultural awareness is undeniable. Leaders operate in increasingly diverse environments, where cultural differences affect collaboration and outcomes. According to a 2023 report by Boston University, there are now over 80,000 multinational companies. These account for half

Only 53% of youth globally engage in cultural activities such as visiting museums, attending live performances, or participating in lectures.

of all international trade, and employ millions globally. For both political and corporate leaders, understanding cultural nuances is essential to navigating complex global challenges, from climate change to cybersecurity and migration.⁵ An understanding of different cultures is therefore necessary for leaders to succeed and grow.

However, the 2024 GYI revealed a gap: only 53% of youth globally engage in cultural activities such as visiting museums, attending live performances, or participating in lectures. This highlights a missed and easily accessible opportunity for young leaders to build cultural awareness and adaptability, key traits needed to thrive in leadership roles. The above suggests that the topic of culture might be underestimated by youth in terms of its relevance for their own development. In the following, the report will highlight how language and cultural awareness can improve the perception of young leaders.

Exhibit 1: Youth Cultural Participation Rates by Country
Participation Rate (%)



Source: Misk Global Youth Index 2024

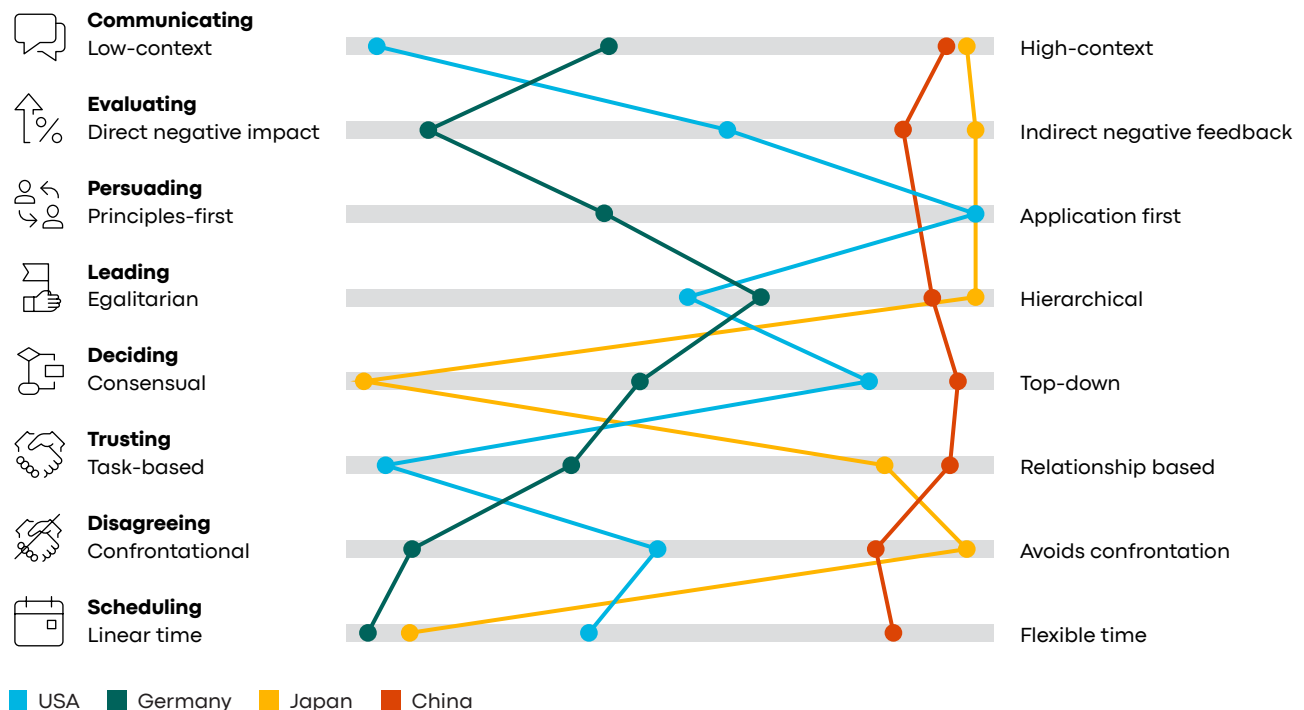
Developing Cultural Awareness: Tools for Youth Leaders

Building cultural awareness begins with a deeper understanding of how cultural norms influence perception. Erin Meyer's Culture Map provides valuable insights through eight dimensions of communication and behavior, such as decision-making styles, trust-building, and leadership approaches. These dimensions help leaders identify

subtle yet impactful differences across cultures, enabling them to navigate global teams and avoid misunderstandings. Meyer's research shows that understanding these dimensions is foundational to success in diverse, global teams.

Exhibit 2 outlines the dimensions that provide more nuanced insight into cultural factors that shape perception in decision-making contexts.⁶

Exhibit 2: Cultural Relativity — Understanding how one culture sees another

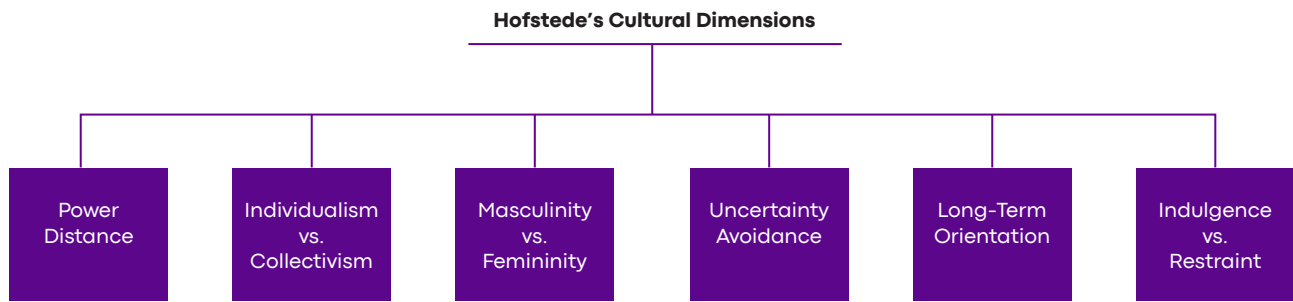


Source: Meyer, E. (2014). The Culture Map: Breaking through the invisible boundaries of global business

Complementing Meyer's work, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, particularly the Power Distance Index (PDI), offer a broader lens to understand cultural attitudes toward authority and hierarchy.⁷ For example, low PDI cultures like Denmark and Sweden prioritize egalitarian structures, whereas

high PDI cultures like China and Russia emphasize hierarchical relationships. Recognizing these differences can help young leaders adapt their approaches to various cultural settings, improving collaboration and influence.

Exhibit 3: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions



Source: Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. 3rd Edition. USA: McGraw-Hill

Language as a Gateway to Cross-Cultural Communication

Culture and communication are deeply intertwined, and language forms the foundation of effective interaction. A shared language enables understanding and connection, making it a crucial tool for young leaders. However, the type of leadership youth aspires to — local or global — should determine their language efforts. For those aiming for grassroots impact, strengthening native or regional languages can foster trust and inclusion within their communities. On a global scale, English remains essential, serving as the lingua franca for international business and diplomacy.

The United Nations exemplifies this approach with its six official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. Each language reflects the organization's commitment to inclusivity, ensuring representation across diverse

geographies. Similarly, youth should consider the linguistic requirements of their chosen leadership paths. For example, aspiring diplomats may focus on French or Arabic, while global entrepreneurs might prioritize English.

Returning the focus to the question, "How can youth maximize their impact at the decision-making table?". The answer lies in becoming versatile, culturally aware communicators. Language is not just a tool for communication — it's a bridge to cultural understanding, collaboration, and influence. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, youth must seize every opportunity to break barriers and make their voices heard in every environment they encounter. Whether strengthening local languages for grassroots leadership or mastering English for global influence, young leaders must invest in their linguistic capabilities.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR YOUTH LEADERS: Culture in Action

■ **Communicate across cultures:** Use modern technology and accessible media like social platforms, podcasts, or videos to clearly communicate your message, even across language barriers. Focus on storytelling and visual aids that transcend linguistic differences to connect with diverse audiences.

■ **Immerse yourself in other cultures:** As there is a limit on how well culture can be understood from books and scholarly studies, culture needs to be experienced in order to be fully comprehended. Many countries offer exchange programs and even financial aid, as detailed in the following section of the report, to support youth in becoming cultural chameleons and global citizens.

■ **Be open and adaptable:** All cultures have their advantages and disadvantages, be open and curious. The knowledge of the small differences is essential for the development of an international career.

■ **Leverage research:** Meyer and Hofstede provide great insights that can be leveraged as a reference for cultural awareness. Utilize insights from their research as broad guidelines that

should be adapted to real-world situations. The frameworks can help to understand how power dynamics, trust, and communication vary across cultures. Respect hierarchies in some settings while fostering open dialogue in others and adapt your approach to building trust and delivering messages based on cultural norms. These insights will help you navigate diverse teams and decision-making environments effectively.

Advocating for Real Influence in High-Stakes Settings

Our globalized world poses globalized problems that span our planet in terms of size and impact. As established earlier, governments and political leaders must possess deep cultural awareness in order to be able to collaboratively navigate these unilateral issues. For youth to develop the same level of adaptability, they need the guidance and advocacy of established leaders who can draw on their own experiences. By fostering an inclusive and empowering attitude toward young leaders, established figures can encourage them to voice their ideas and ensure their opinions are meaningfully included in decision-making processes. This chapter will explore how such advocacy can bridge the gap between youth and established leaders, leveraging the experiences of the latter to create supportive policies and structures. Only when both generations work together, acknowledging each other's strengths, will young leaders gain the opportunity to make a genuine and lasting impact.

Advocating for Evidence Instead of Legacy

Every leader relies on a team of supporters to champion their decisions and help drive initiatives forward — no one can succeed in isolation. For youth, who often face heightened challenges in decision-making environments, the backing of experienced leaders can significantly enhance their chances of influence. This support can take two key forms: On the one hand, advocating for young leaders by endorsing their ideas, decisions, and championing

rational. On the other hand, by fostering evidence-based decision-making processes that reduce bias and ensure all voices, including those of youth, are heard equitably.

To start, experienced leaders should take an official stance on advocating for young leaders, increasing their visibility and improving their perception within high-stakes environments. This enhances youth leaders' chances to impact decision-making. It is vital that such support does not come from the sidelines or through hidden task forces. Established leaders should openly advocate for youth, inspiring other leaders to do the same. A powerful example comes from the African Union's Youth Envoy initiative, where senior leaders publicly champion young leaders to amplify their voices in shaping continental policies⁸. By leveraging the trust and credibility they have built over time, these advocates can help youth break through entrenched perceptions and make their contributions more impactful.

Beyond direct advocacy, established leaders should work to reshape decision-making processes to be more inclusive of youth input. Emphasizing data-driven decisions — based on rationality, evidence, and transparency — helps eliminate biases based on age, status, or culture. For young leaders, data-driven processes diminish the impact of perceived inexperience; for established leaders with accountability, they increase the likelihood of sound decision outcomes.

Research underscores the advantages of this approach. A study by The Economist found that 55% of executives from market-leading companies base their decisions primarily on data, with intuition and experience taking a secondary role. Similarly, a PwC survey of 1,000 senior executives revealed that data-focused organizations are three times more likely to report significant improvements in decision outcomes compared to those that rely less on data.

Leading companies like Amazon exemplify the transformative power of data-driven processes. By leveraging customer data, such as browsing behavior and purchase patterns, Amazon drives personalized recommendations that accounted for 35% of its annual sales as early as 2013. This data-centric approach remains at the heart of Amazon's success and showcases the broader potential of evidence-based decision-making.

Data-driven decisions hold particular promise for intergenerational collaboration. Experienced leaders bring the context of past decisions, while younger leaders offer data fluency and innovative perspectives. Traditional, experience-based decision-making often falls short in addressing

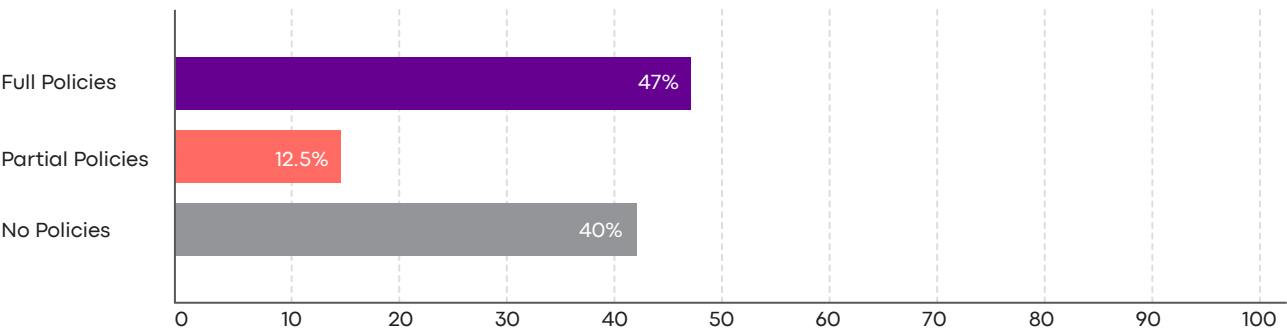
today's complex global issues, which require adaptive and innovative solutions. By embracing evidence-based processes, established leaders create an inclusive environment that values youth contributions while remaining grounded in rationality.

In a world of complex, shared challenges, the insights of established leaders are invaluable in creating structures that support youth in becoming effective, globally minded citizens. The following section will explore how the experiences of senior leaders can shape policies and programs that prepare youth to tackle these issues.

Advocating for Youth to Become Global Citizens

Back to the importance of cultural awareness, Misk findings show that governance leaders by in large understand that policies on culture play a key role in improving both the youth's understanding of their own nations, and their openness to other cultures. Out of 40 countries assessed along the lines of Misk's 2024 GYI, 47% already have full policies on culture in place, 12.5% partially, and 40% have no policies in place.

Exhibit 4: Governments with Policies on Culture

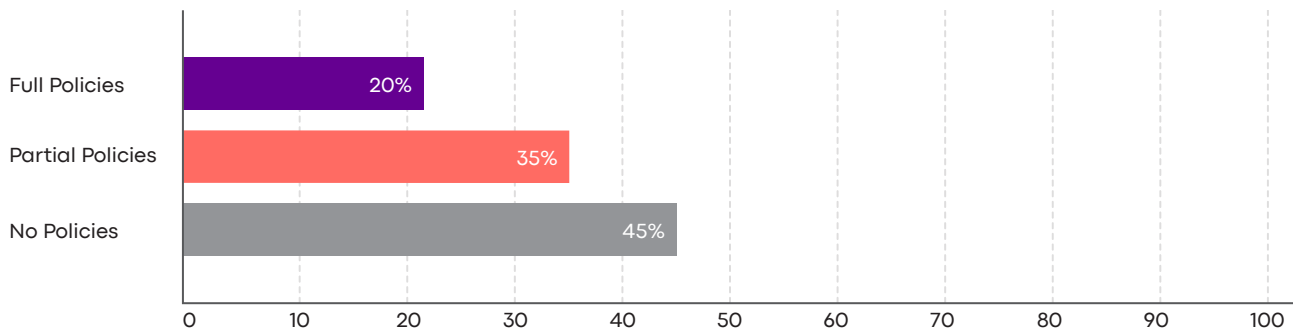


Source: Misk Global Youth Index 2024

On the contrary, the value of global citizenship, leadership and civic engagement has so far only found its way into 20% of agendas with full policy

in place, 35% with partial policies fitting the criteria, and 45% with no policies at all.

Exhibit 5: Policies on Global Citizenship, Leadership, Civic Engagement



Source: Misk Global Youth Index 2024

A proven policy that fosters real cultural participation is cultural exchange. Immersing in a different country — including creating emotional bonds with its people and developing an appreciation of new food and habits — is a powerful tool when it comes to creating deep cultural awareness.

Accordingly, it comes as no surprise that 53% of nations screened for the GYI 2024 have full policies for exchange in place and 50% also offer corresponding financial

53% of nations screened for the GYI have full policies on exchange in place with 50% also offering corresponding financial support.

support. Leaders must advocate for the expansion of these initiatives, ensuring young participants' safety while unlocking the immense potential of cultural immersion to drive global awareness and collaboration.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ESTABLISHED LEADERS:

Advocate for Youth to Lead with Evidence and Empathy

■ **Advocate for Youth and Level the Playing Field in Decision-Making:** Promote rational, data-driven decision-making frameworks that prioritize objective evidence over bias. By placing evidence such as data at the center of decision-making, leaders can reduce biases based on age, experience, or background, thus creating a fairer environment where young leaders have an equal opportunity to influence outcomes. This shift not only increases decision quality, but empowers youth by valuing their contributions on equal footing with those of established leaders, allowing for a more inclusive and transparent leadership process.

■ **Champion Global Citizenship and Cross-Cultural Understanding:** Foster a sense of global citizenship among young leaders to help them navigate complex, international challenges in today's interconnected world. Support youth by creating policies and providing resources, such as grants and mentorship, to promote global engagement. Encourage corporate initiatives like inter-company international placements or cultural exchange programs that allow young leaders to gain firsthand experience working in diverse environments. These opportunities strengthen their sense of global community and build a deep understanding of cross-cultural dynamics, preparing them to address challenges with empathy and adaptability.



Building Skills

Equipping Youth with Crucial Leadership Skills

To gain a comprehensive view on effective leadership, understanding that culture and communication is foundational is only the starting point. To truly thrive and influence decision-making environments, youth must pair cultural awareness with the skills required to navigate and lead in these settings. While the ability to connect across diverse cultural landscapes lays the groundwork, the tools to drive meaningful action — skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability — are what empower young leaders to make a lasting impact. As we shift from exploring cultural dynamics to focusing on the skills youth need, the gap between opportunity and readiness comes into sharper focus.

Data from Misk's 2024 Global Youth Index (GYI) shows that only 44% of youth feel confident that their education has prepared them with the skills necessary to lead in various settings, such as in the community or

in a job. This stark figure underscores the reality: opening up leadership opportunities is not enough if young leaders are not equipped to thrive in them. In fact, according to the GYI survey, the majority of youth across all levels of education do not feel equipped for leadership. This issue is further pronounced when exploring the situation of underprivileged youth, those limited to compulsory education, only 23% of these people feel equipped to take on leadership tasks. This highlights that even though education systems do prepare young leaders to enter decision-making environments, it is not enough.

Current systems often delay the development of leadership skills until individuals reach leadership positions, creating a critical gap. To address this, youth must be equipped with skills early in their careers, enabling them to contribute effectively and integrate their unique perspectives into established decision-making processes.

A Future-Proof Skillset

To uncover the skills that leaders need to thrive in today's complex world, this report examined insights from leading business schools such as Harvard and Oxford Business School alongside the latest research from the World Economic Forum (WEF).⁹ These institutions, known for shaping the next generation of global leaders, emphasize a core set of skills essential for leadership. The findings align with GYI data, which not only underscores the importance of these competencies, but also reveals significant gaps in the guidance provided to youth for developing them. Addressing these gaps early can empower young leaders with the tools to navigate complexity and drive impactful change:

- Problem Solving
- Communication and Collaboration
- Personal Mastery: Confidence, Resilience, and Growth
- Technical Skills



1 Problem Solving

According to the Misk GYI, at 48% only half of global youth feel that their education prepared them to creatively and critically solve problems that they encounter at work or in their personal life. Again, the situation worsens when looking at disadvantaged youth that only received compulsory education, with only 30% feeling sufficiently equipped.

Problem solving is the process of removing obstacles that hinder one from reaching one's goals and is therefore essential to all aspects of life. Systematic approaches to problem solving should therefore be introduced to youth early on to give them the opportunity to practice and thereby improve this skill as early as possible. There are various structured approaches to problem solving. Some issues can be resolved with analytical approaches to problem solving, for which technical skills are essential (we will discuss these in point four). Meanwhile, design thinking provides a great system for tackling complicated problems where solutions are not obvious and various stakeholders increase the level of complexity. Design thinking tackles

complex problems by first deeply understanding the experiences, needs, and emotions of those affected. It then narrows down to the core issue, setting a clear focus for creative problem-solving. With this foundation, design thinking encourages the exploration of diverse, innovative solutions, followed by developing actionable plans. Finally, real-world testing and feedback allow for refinement, ensuring the solution truly meets the needs identified.¹⁰



2 Communication and Collaboration

Effective communication is inseparable from the ability to collaborate. Understanding and effectively communicating with team members are the cornerstones of aligning efforts and working towards shared goals. However, much like problem-solving, collaboration remains an area where youth feel underprepared. According to GYI data, only 48% of youth believe their education has equipped them to solve complex problems collaboratively, whether at work or in personal settings. This gap is even more pronounced among those with only compulsory education, where just 27% feel adequately prepared, highlighting the urgent need to nurture collaborative skills across people with all kinds of backgrounds and levels of education.

Effective communication is a lifelong skill, vital in every stage of personal and professional development. It begins with active listening — showing respect and genuinely understanding others' perspectives. Nonverbal cues like eye contact and open body language enhance engagement, while thoughtful questions and clear summarization create shared understanding. Beyond these basics, advanced interpersonal skills such as relationship-building, constructive feedback, and assertive yet

Only 48% of global youth believe their education has equipped them to solve complex problems collaboratively.

respectful communication are key to managing conflicts and fostering collaboration, making them indispensable tools for achieving common goals.¹¹



③ Personal Mastery: Confidence, Resilience, and Growth

Leadership requires a variety of important soft skills and character traits including self-control, teachability, and resilience.

As Francisco Dao, a leadership researcher, states: “Trying to become a leader without first building self-confidence is like building a house on sand. Leadership cannot exist without self-confidence present in the leader. It is necessary and fundamental for leadership growth.”¹² Without confidence in one’s abilities and judgment, it is difficult to inspire others or even desire their support. Developing self-confidence is the foundation of leadership, and it starts with practice. Engaging in extracurricular activities like team sports, youth organizations, or community initiatives can provide valuable opportunities to build confidence. These settings allow young leaders to work in teams, take responsibility, speak publicly, motivate others, and face challenges — all of which prepare them to navigate future situations with greater assurance.

Another critical skill for leadership growth is teachability. Success often requires learning from failure, a process young leaders must embrace. Recognizing weaknesses, admitting mistakes, and sharing achievements while staying open to growth are vital habits to develop. This mindset

Global youth have the basic abilities needed for jobs nowadays, in fact over 70% score highly on elemental abilities such as creating a presentation or editing photos.

of viewing failure as a stepping stone to success is embedded in some cultures, such as Silicon Valley’s innovation-driven ethos. Here, resilience — the ability to recover and adapt after setbacks — is as celebrated as the drive to succeed, making it a key ingredient for leadership in a rapidly changing world.



④ Technical Skills

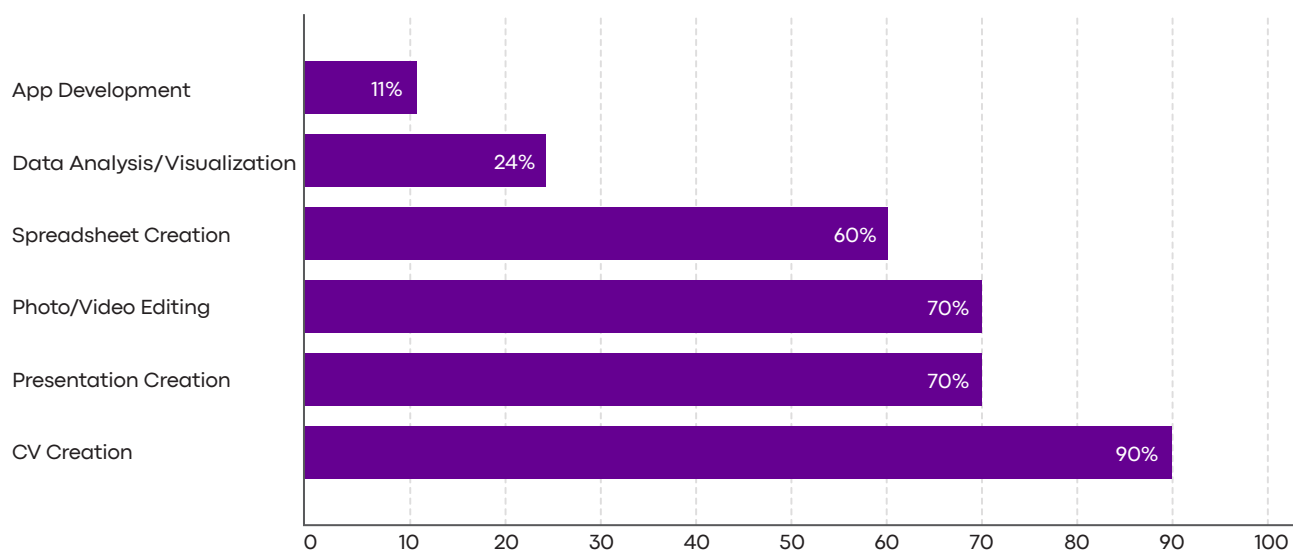
In our modern world, almost all interactions are becoming increasingly digital. In order to fully comprehend situations and problems, youth need to master technical skills to successfully advocate for their interests.

Misk’s GYI asked global youth for an assessment of a range of technical abilities. The evaluation first looks at basic abilities that youth need for most jobs nowadays: creating a CV, a presentation, and an edited, published photo or video. Global youth scored high with over 70% for all these elemental abilities, with CV creation even reaching 90%. Parts of these skills such as editing photos and videos come easily because youth have daily interaction with digital tools and social media. Thus, fostering high levels of capability.

However, taking a deeper look into skills related to the necessary analysis of data, a less positive picture is displayed. It has already been established within this report, on [page 11](#), that given the abundance of data available, being able to analyze and draw conclusions from data is more crucial than ever. Nevertheless, the results of the GYI show a steep decline in the competence level of youth: only 60% feel comfortable creating a spreadsheet and a low 24% know how to analyze and/or visualize complex data with specialized software such as Excel and PowerBI. This is the second lowest score of the ranking, with the lowest being a mere 11% of youth who are able to develop an app. This underscores the critical need to invest time and resources into training to enhance the analysis and visualization of complex data, especially as our world becomes increasingly data-driven and dependent.

Exhibit 6: Global Youth Proficiency in Technical Abilities

Proficiency Level (%)



Source: Misk Global Youth Index 2024

Finally, a key tool that aids in developing and enhancing technical skills is something that young people appear to adapt to very quickly: artificial

intelligence. The GYI data suggest that 70% of youth already use AI for simple tasks, as well as to save time.



RECOMMENDATION FOR YOUTH LEADERS:

Develop and Practice Leadership Skills in Your Daily Life

■ **Develop Problem Solving Capabilities:** Strengthen your ability to solve problems creatively and critically by learning and practicing structured approaches to problem-solving early on. Methods like design thinking offer effective frameworks for tackling complex challenges that require empathy, innovation, and collaboration with multiple stakeholders. Cultivating this skill is essential for overcoming barriers in both one's professional and personal life, equipping youth to approach issues systematically and refine solutions through real-world testing and feedback.

■ **Establish Good Communication Habits:** Develop effective communication habits by practicing active listening, using open body language, and asking thoughtful questions to foster clarity and connection. Build on these foundational skills by honing interpersonal abilities like

giving and receiving feedback, assertive self-expression, and constructive negotiation. Mastering these skills will not only improve your ability to engage meaningfully but also help you navigate conflicts, build trust, and achieve common goals.

■ **Master Resilience and Teachability:** Build your capacity for resilience and a teachable mindset by embracing challenges and viewing failure as an opportunity to grow. Engage in confidence-building activities such as team sports or community initiatives to strengthen your ability to lead under pressure, adapt to setbacks, and inspire others. Cultivate self-control by learning to recognize weaknesses, admit mistakes, and remain open to feedback. These traits will empower you to navigate complex leadership settings with perseverance and a commitment to continuous improvement.

■ **Invest Time in Learning Technical Skills:** Enhance digital literacy by building on basic technical skills, such as creating presentations or editing content, as well as more advanced competencies in data analysis and visualization. Mastering tools like Excel or PowerPI will empower you to make informed

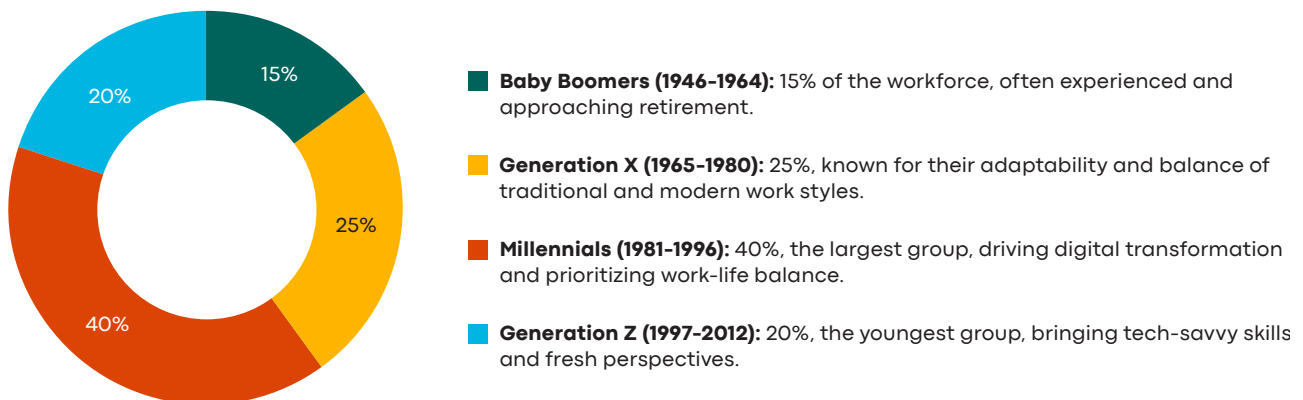
decisions in today's data-driven world. Additionally, leverage AI as a valuable resource for boosting productivity and improving technical proficiency, allowing you to advocate for your interests more effectively and navigate complex digital environments with confidence.

Fostering Effective Intergenerational Collaboration

Building on the foundation of individual skills and self-management explored in the previous chapter, the next step in cultivating effective leadership is collaboration, particularly across generations. With our world's population aging rapidly, the proportion of individuals aged 50 and above is projected to increase from 37% in 2020 to 45% by 2050¹³. Today, this demographic shift towards aging populations is leading to extended working lives, leading to a unique convergence of four to five generations

within the workplace, and often in decision-making settings. As of 2024, the workforce is composed of Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964), Generation X (born 1965-1980), Millennials (born 1981-1996), and Generation Z (born 1997-2012), each bringing their distinct values, experiences, and work styles. Just like in a multigenerational household, this generational diversity can prove challenging, but it also provides ample opportunities that will be highlighted further on.

Exhibit 7: Generational Composition of the Workforce (2024)



Source: Misk Global Youth Index 2024

Benefits for Performance and Productivity

The convergence of these diverse generations is not merely a trend; it is a vital asset. Intergenerational collaboration can be an essential factor for the success of businesses and institutions in terms of innovation, productivity, and retention. Both younger and older generations offer complementary

strengths that, when effectively combined, can significantly improve performance. Youth, such as members of Generation Z, are known to bring fresh perspectives, technological savviness, and an eagerness to innovate. More seasoned society members, such as those from the Baby Boomer and Generation X cohorts, contribute

years of accumulated wisdom, deep institutional knowledge, and finely honed leadership skills.

A study conducted by the World Economic Forum (WEF), American Association of Retired Persons, and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) emphasizes the economic potential of multigenerational workforces. It reveals that investing in age-diverse teams could raise GDP per capita by nearly 19% over the next 30 years¹⁴. Other case studies highlighting best practices deployed at four leading Fortune 500 firms, indicate that intergenerational knowledge-sharing programs, or multigenerational inventor teams, are responsible for 18-24% higher patent production through multigenerational inventor teams.¹⁵ Similarly LinkedIn's 2022 Global Talent Trends, a survey of 7,723 professionals aged 22 to 70 across 10 nations, highlights that 86% of respondents agree that generationally diverse teams enhance idea sharing. In the same survey, 83% reported that age-inclusive workplaces that focused on collaborative systems to foster cross-generational cooperation reduced conflict and improved trust among employees.¹⁶

From a cost perspective, leveraging the complimentary nature of skills across generations can act as a tool for savings. A case study on a leading Fortune 500 company showed \$81 million in cumulative cost savings over a six-year period thanks to Millennial staffers training Baby Boomer leaders in how to use modern tools such as communication apps and technical shortcuts.¹⁷

Executives increasingly understand and value age diversity, as evidenced by a survey where 83% of employers acknowledged that creating a more multigenerational workforce is either very or somewhat valuable for their organization's success and growth.¹⁸ The business case for age diversity is clear: diverse teams drive innovation, enhance decision-making, and ultimately contribute to a company's competitive edge. Yet, despite the clear advantages and the shifting demographics, many organizations and institutions struggle to implement

Nearly a quarter of global youth do not feel heard or taken into consideration by decision makers in their community.

the necessary policies and processes to foster effective intergenerational collaboration. Data from the Misk GYI shows that global efforts have been made, with 46% of youth agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement: "The decision makers in my community consider young peoples' opinions when making decisions that affect the future of the community". However, the remaining 54% split into 32% who are ambivalent, and nearly a quarter 22% who do not feel heard or taken into consideration by decision makers. For companies and governments to fully harness the potential of age-diversity, they must implement structured approaches that promote intergenerational collaboration.

Global Examples of Intergenerational Collaboration Systems

As the global population ages and more generations converge in decision-making environments, it is vital to examine how different cultures address the challenges and opportunities of intergenerational collaboration. The examples highlighted in this chapter showcase various approaches where experience and innovation are equally valued, fostering teams built on mutual respect and shared objectives. These examples, drawn from Japan, Saudi Arabia, and the United States, illustrate how governments and organizations can create systems that enable effective collaboration across generations.

Japan: Senpai-Kohai Principle

The **Senpai-Kohai** principle is a core of Japanese workplace culture, fostering a respectful, hierarchical relationship where seniors (senpai) mentor juniors (kohai) in both work and personal areas. This system plays a pivotal role in facilitating

intergenerational collaboration by enabling the transfer of skills, institutional knowledge, and social understanding. Beyond work, senpais also guide kohais in navigating broader professional and personal dynamics, fostering their development.

While the Senpai-Kohai framework fosters mentorship and mutual support, it requires careful management to maintain balance. Without oversight, the inherent hierarchy may lead to misuse of authority or stifle open communication. Organizations must ensure these dynamics remain fair and constructive, enabling both parties to benefit from this traditional yet adaptable system of collaboration.

This principle reflects Japan's tradition of respecting seniority, maintained through a reciprocal relationship where juniors honor their mentors' experience, and mentors commit to their growth. Japan has a moderate rating on the Power Distance Index (PDI) of 54, which enables collaborative hierarchy. This means the framework of Senpai-Kohai could work well across other countries that have similar ratings on the PDI, which generally indicates places where respect for hierarchy aligns with teamwork, such as in the United States, France, and South Korea.

Saudi Arabia: Vision 2030

After examining Japan, where 29% of the population is aged 65 and older¹⁹, we now turn to Saudi Arabia, one of the world's youngest countries, where 67% of the population is under the age of 35²⁰. This stark contrast highlights the unique challenges and opportunities facing each country. While Japan focuses on supporting its aging population, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 prioritizes empowering its youthful demography as a key factor in achieving long-term economic and social reform.

In this context, intergenerational collaboration plays a pivotal role, as Vision 2030 emphasizes the need for mentorship, education, and skills development to ensure that Saudi youth can contribute meaningfully to the country's transformation. A cornerstone

of Vision 2030's youth empowerment efforts, the Misk Foundation places particular emphasis on mentorship as a tool for developing future leaders. Through initiatives like the Misk Fellowship, which has facilitated over 2,700 mentoring and coaching sessions, Misk has gathered valuable insights into what makes mentoring relationships successful. The recommendation section will provide learnings that Misk has gathered from their extensive mentorship experience.

United States: Silicon Valley, A Reversed Trend in Age and Innovation

In a speech at Stanford University, Mark Zuckerberg famously said, "I want to stress the importance of being young and technical. Young people are just smarter." This quote embodies the prevalent mindset in Silicon Valley, where youth is often seen as a key driver of innovation.

The average age of billion-dollar start-up founders in Silicon Valley is just over 31, while this is the age they are when starting the company, it's still young when contrasted with the average age of Fortune 500 CEOs, which is 52.9 years.²¹ This discrepancy highlights, as Forbes put it, younger entrepreneurs being seen as more likely to take the risks necessary to achieve the massive growth often demanded by Silicon Valley's business model.²²

As start-ups scale, the need for seasoned leadership becomes evident. Harvard Business Review notes that while many billion-dollar founders begin in their 20s or 30s, they often step back from the CEO role as their companies mature. The average CEO age at these scaled start-ups is around 42, reflecting a shift toward stability and experience to navigate complex challenges²³. This trend shows that even Silicon Valley, with its youth preference, values the balance of innovation and strategic insight that comes from intergenerational collaboration, allowing tech companies to sustain growth by harnessing the strengths of both young founders and experienced executives.



RECOMMENDATION FOR ESTABLISHED LEADERS:

Leverage the Benefits of Intergenerational Collaboration

The need for effective intergenerational collaboration is clear, but implementation can be complex and must be tailored to team composition, cultural factors like power distance, and communication styles. Success requires structured planning, monitoring outcomes, and gathering participant feedback. Below, four easily applicable approaches are detailed. These have proven to boost innovation capacity by up to 18% and help reduce age bias, making them adaptable for various organizational settings.²⁴

■ **Introduce Mentoring Programs:** Mentoring programs that pair youth with experienced mentors, as well as reverse mentoring programs that facilitate bidirectional knowledge exchange, are invaluable tools for fostering trust and collaboration. To make these programs effective, leaders should prioritize pairing mentors and mentees with shared values, emphasize honest feedback, and cultivate mutual respect. Clear objectives, such as personal growth and skills development, should be set from the outset, with regular and open communication maintained throughout the mentorship.

■ **Source for Intergenerational Teaming:** Particularly for complex tasks and decisions, tapping the complementary strengths of different age groups can be a helpful tool for corporations and institutions alike. By intentionally designing mixed-age teams, institutions can leverage the diverse perspectives of different generations. Whether in politics, committees or advisory boards, groups should include representatives of different ages to ensure that decisions reflect the needs of all affected. This also encourages innovation, as older members bring wisdom and experience, while younger ones contribute fresh ideas and often a more tech-savvy approach.

■ **Establish Knowledge Transfer Programs:** For every position or job there are technical and social knowledge aspects that may be conveyed. The simplest and most effective practice for intergenerational knowledge transfer is called “Leaving a Trail”. For this approach, senior employees document key work processes and essential information before retiring or moving into a new position. A strong foundation of knowledge documentation and transfer can also be bidirectional, offering both sides the chance to learn and improve..²⁵

■ **Value Social Activities:** Encourage social activities that bring together team members from different generations in informal, task-free settings. These interactions help dismantle stereotypes, build trust, and foster mutual understanding. Activities such as team-building exercises, social gatherings, or cultural exchange programs provide opportunities to appreciate each other’s strengths and perspectives, creating a more cohesive and collaborative workplace environment.

In conclusion, as the global population ages, businesses and leaders must harness the strengths of intergenerational collaboration. Embracing age diversity not only boosts productivity but also prepares organizations and governments to thrive in a complex world. Policies should strategically support a multigenerational workforce by distributing resources and establishing systems that empower youth to work alongside older generations on equal footing. The following chapter will provide an overview of essential resources and suggest effective systems.



Accessing and Providing Resources

Vital Resources and Support Systems

A fact that holds true for all generations of leaders is that having access to the right resources and systems is a non-negotiable when it comes to driving meaningful impact. This applies to leaders of all ages, industries, and decision-making settings. There are three types of resources that are essential to achieving impact in all types of decision-making settings: intellectual, financial, and social resources. As these are required by youth leaders in order to be effective in their actions, it is vital that established leaders recognize these needs and use their power to foster sufficient access to these resources. The following will detail three resources that have been cited throughout literature and the reports of leading institutions such as the UN, the EU's Youth Forum and the WEF as vital means achieving impact while simultaneously making sure these key resources are fairly distributed.

Social Capital

Social capital, defined as a "collective asset in the form of shared norms, values, beliefs, trust, networks, and social relations,"²⁶ is critical in empowering youth to establish credibility, access

decision-making spaces, and build opportunities. Yet, GYI data reveals significant gaps in youth access to the relationships and networks necessary for success: only 23% of respondents report receiving clear guidance on how to build a professional network, while 44% indicate partial guidance, and a troubling 33% say they received none at all. This lack of mentorship and networking opportunities leaves many young leaders disconnected from the influential relationships and support that are crucial to their growth.

Mentorship programs offer a practical and impactful solution to bridge this gap. According to Misk's 2024 Global Youth Index (GYI), 50% of respondents found mentoring very useful, with an additional 30% considering it somewhat useful. Yet, this resource remains inaccessible to 47% of global youth, underscoring the need for more inclusive mentorship opportunities. Effective mentorship requires thoughtful design: pairing mentors and mentees based on shared values, fostering honest feedback, and prioritizing mutual respect. A strong mentorship begins with both parties

Mentorship programs remain important, with 80% of global youth finding them useful. Yet, this resource remains inaccessible to 47% of global youth.

committing to personal growth through regular, open communication — a simple but vital foundation for success.

Support from community and corporate leaders is pivotal in implementing these initiatives. Programs like Saudi Arabia's Misk Job Shadowing and Project 1932 illustrate how mentorship can foster meaningful social capital. Misk's Job Shadowing provides hands-on experience in government and private sector roles, equipping youth with career guidance and helping them make informed decisions about their future. Project 1932 matches university students with experienced mentors, enabling the transfer of knowledge, lessons, and professional insights while broadening mentees' career horizons.

To address the social capital gap, established leaders must prioritize creating systems that connect youth with mentors, peers, and networks. By prioritizing mentorship and structured networking opportunities, leaders can help youth overcome barriers to social capital and position them for success. These programs not only open doors but also ensure young leaders have the support and relationships needed to thrive in decision-making environments.

Financial Resources

The access to sufficient financial means is always essential, whether in the corporate or governance world. With regards to youth leaders, there are two important aspects. Firstly, the road to becoming a youth leader is often restricted by lack of financial support. Secondly, for youth leaders to drive impact their initiatives need to receive adequate funding.

A recent agenda policy brief by the UN Secretary General, highlights that there is a lack in systematic and structured resourcing to support youth participation. Therefore, often only very privileged youth can afford the high expenses required to participate and volunteer their time to engage in multilateral processes. This leads to negative effects, particularly when it comes to diversity, as the limited financial support results in systematic exclusion of disadvantaged youth and a limitation to the diversity of youth voices. It also leads to a higher turnover among participating youth leaders and a resulting lack of consistent leadership.²⁷ This fact feeds into and engraves the perception of inexperience that youth leaders struggle with as described in earlier in this report.

Even some of the world's most recognized and established youth programs, such as the UN Youth Delegates, struggle with a lack of funding. As the UN's "Youth Delegate Guide" noted in 2020, "the costs associated with establishing a program are normally borne by Member States". In some instances, Member States have also asked the youth delegate to raise some funds required for their participation.²⁸ The onus should not be placed on the youth who strive to participate and contribute their voice, but rather on established leaders who should prioritize systematic funding for youth inclusion.

Intellectual Capital

Education, knowledge, and training are indispensable for preparing youth to become effective leaders. However, a significant gap persists in equipping young people with the intellectual capital needed to make informed decisions and navigate complex leadership environments. According to a recent OECD report, schools can play a pivotal role in addressing this gap, especially for students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The report highlights the transformative potential of targeted career guidance in offering such students pathways into leadership.²⁹ Yet, access to these resources remains uneven, leaving many young people unprepared to step into decision-making roles.

Corporate involvement is equally critical. Companies, which stand to benefit from a well-prepared future workforce, must take an active role in shaping leadership development initiatives. Internships, mentorship programs, and leadership training tailored to real-world challenges can bridge the gap between education and workplace demands. These programs not only prepare youth to engage in decision-making, but also provide essential exposure to professional environments, allowing them to refine their skills in practice.

Globally, vocational training offers a promising model of collaboration between governments, employers, and trade unions. According to recent GYI data, 65% of the 40 countries surveyed have vocational programs in place. However, only half of these programs receive consistent funding, limiting their reach and effectiveness. Without adequate financial support, even the most well-designed initiatives struggle to achieve their full potential.

To address this issue, established leaders in both educational and corporate sectors must prioritize actionable solutions. Schools should foster environments that promote critical thinking, governance understanding, and leadership skills from an early age. Corporations should co-create programs with educational institutions to ensure alignment with real-world needs, while governments must provide consistent funding to sustain these efforts. Bridging the gap between education and practice will build a generation of youth leaders who are not only ready to lead but also equipped to drive meaningful change.

Systems for Meaningful Youth Inclusion

Youth in decision-making roles cannot be expected to succeed without access to these necessary resources. While young leaders are increasingly included in leadership conversations, there often remains a gap between discourse and action, and youth participation is treated as a quota to fill rather than a serious consideration. Aside from the required investment into the resources needed and

the capabilities of youth, structured systems for the effective inclusion of youth in decision-making processes should be set up. The recent agenda brief of the UN Secretary General, mentioned on the previous page, similarly concludes that it is vital to “ensure the systematic integration of meaningful youth participation into all United Nations intergovernmental mechanisms and processes at the global and regional levels”³⁰. The following section will take a deeper look into what systems could foster both youth inclusion and impact most effectively.

Shadow boards are a great example of successful systemic integration of youth into leadership processes. In the corporate context, a shadow board is defined as a group of young, nonexecutive employees appointed to work on strategic initiatives together with the executive board. The system aims to provide advantages of youth integration, such as providing fresh perspectives and insights to a company’s, usually aged 50+ leadership team, and thereby driving strategy. Corporate examples of shadow board initiatives include significant strategic projects such as redesigning a business model, developing a new marketing plan, or redefining key processes.³¹

Harvard Business Review has conducted extensive research on the topic to find that there are two primary benefits that organizations gained through shadow board inclusion. First, it is easier for these companies to test and pilot initiatives that are important to younger stakeholders, such as customers and employees. Second, they benefit from increased intergenerational collaboration, bridging gaps between employees of different age-groups. This enhances respect, understanding and trust across management levels.³² These positive outcomes were observed for companies of all sizes, from very small (25 employees) to very large (200,000+ workers) across various industries and geographies, emphasizing that this systematic approach is widely applicable and should be adopted beyond the corporate world.

The establishment of empowering systems such as shadow boards can create pathways for youth to gain experience before transitioning into more authoritative roles. At the same time, they can mitigate the risks established leaders face when elevating inexperienced leaders by de-risking the decision-making process. Through the sharing of power and responsibility, young people can engage in decision-making without bearing the full burden of leadership. These initiatives mean they are invited to join the process, contribute their unique perspectives and knowledge, and learn from more experienced leaders. These leaders also benefit

from the fresh input and thereby, knowledge sharing is facilitated in both directions.

Summarizing, it is evident that access to resources — social, financial, and intellectual — is essential for youth to make meaningful contributions in decision-making roles. However, bridging the gap between youth inclusion and impactful action requires established leaders to implement structured support systems, such as shadow boards, to foster true involvement through intergenerational collaboration and resource sharing.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR YOUTH LEADERS: **Proactively Seek Support and Opportunities**

■ **Leverage Available Resources:** Even though this report advocates for even more support and funding of resources for youth, it has to be mentioned that there is already a wide base of grants and programs available globally. Therefore, aspiring young leaders should gain understanding of the financial requirements of youth leadership initiatives and actively pursue funding options, from grants to sponsorships, to support their projects. To effectively do so, the development of a strong network of mentors and industry contacts is vital in order to gain access to guidance and opportunities.

■ **Engage in Shadow Board Opportunities:** This report highlights the significance of enhancing the outward impression of young leaders and the positive impact that intergenerational collaboration can have in this regard. Young leaders should pursue roles in shadow boards or similar programs to gain firsthand experience in strategic decision-making, and to connect to and learn from senior leadership.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ESTABLISHED LEADERS: **Systematically Empower Youth**

■ **Facilitate Resource Access:** In order to ensure that the inclusion of youth in decision-making settings is not merely an exercise to fulfill quotas, they have to be equipped with access to essential resources — social, financial, and intellectual. Only with the help of established leaders who can initiate respective programs and policies, secure their funding, and ensure their accessibility can the required level of resource distribution be achieved. Becoming a role model who mentors young leaders, promotes supportive policies, and directs resources in that direction is the first step.

■ **Implement and Support Shadow Boards:** The systematic de-risking and thereby opening of decision-making processes to youth facilitates intergenerational collaboration, providing advantages to young and experienced leaders, thus improving decision outcomes. The proven concept of shadow boards should be implemented more often under the consideration of CEO sponsorship, clearly defined goals, and the participation of a diverse group to ensure success of the initiatives.

Closing Remarks

Today's political and corporate leaders navigate an increasingly interconnected world shaped by technology, rapid information exchange, and diverse global markets. Aspiring young leaders have begun to claim their seats in decision-making spaces, but securing a seat is only the first step. Real impact requires overcoming three critical challenges.

First, leadership in today's globalized world demands cultural awareness. Despite this, only 53% of youth globally engage in cultural activities like visiting museums or attending live performances — opportunities that foster cross-cultural understanding. Youth must develop an understanding of how cultural differences shape interactions and decision-making, while established leaders must foster environments that champion youth advocacy, especially in hierarchical cultures where traditional structures limit young voices. Building global citizens is no longer optional; it is essential.

Second, youth must be equipped with the skills to lead before stepping into leadership roles. The gap is stark: only 35% of respondents in Misk's global survey felt somewhat prepared to lead, and an alarming 21% felt completely unprepared. Additionally, just 48% of youth feel their education prepared them to creatively and critically solve problems, leaving them at a disadvantage in both professional and personal contexts. Traditional education often falls short in preparing young leaders for the

realities they will face. Early and targeted training, supported by intergenerational collaboration, is key to fostering leadership capabilities. Understanding and learning from other generations is a critical component for building trust, adaptability, and effective collaboration.

Finally, young leaders need access to resources and systems that empower their participation. Access to social networks, for example, is only available to half of global youth, with 47% lacking structured mentorship opportunities. Without equitable access to social networks, financial resources, and intellectual capital, the potential of almost half of the world's youth remains untapped. Established leaders must prioritize the development of inclusive systems, such as mentorship programs, shadow boards, and resource-sharing initiatives, to create real opportunities for youth to influence decision-making.

This is a decisive moment for leaders of all generations. The future depends on the ability of young leaders to rise to the challenges of tomorrow and the willingness of established leaders to guide and empower them. Let this report serve as a call to action: may youth embrace every opportunity to learn, grow, and lead, and may experienced leaders commit to creating spaces where innovation and wisdom converge. Together, we can unlock the power of intergenerational collaboration to shape a better, more sustainable future for all.

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About Misk

Established by H.R.H. Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Bin Abdulaziz in 2011, Misk Foundation is a non-profit organization devoted to cultivating and encouraging learning and leadership in Saudi youth for a better future for Saudi Arabia.

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