

Leadership in Gen Z: Exploring Constructs, Traits, and Challenges through the Lens of the Indian Knowledge System

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Abstract

This study explores leadership in Gen Z through the lens of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), adopting a constructivist approach to leadership theory. As Gen Z enters the workforce with a strong entrepreneurial mindset, this research examines their leadership constructs, core traits, and the challenges they face as both entrepreneurs and professionals. By integrating principles from IKS, the study investigates how indigenous wisdom, philosophical traditions, and historical leadership models influence Gen Z's leadership perspectives. It delves into generational leadership differences, workplace competencies, motivation, and development opportunities while assessing the impact of traditional Indian leadership values on their decision-making and problem-solving abilities. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Gen Z's leadership preferences and competencies shape their professional and entrepreneurial performance within the modern workplace.

Keywords: Gen Z, Leadership, Working Professionals, Constructivist Grounded Theory, IKS.

Introduction

Gen Z, born between 1995 and 2009, constitutes the largest segment of the global workforce, comprising 27% of working professionals. As digital integrators, they seamlessly incorporate technology into their daily lives, maintain strong social connections through social media, and embrace a mobile and visually driven lifestyle. This generation is entering the professional world with two distinct perspectives on leadership - while Gen Z entrepreneurs are actively exhibiting leadership by launching start-ups and driving innovation, Gen Z working professionals are expecting leadership that aligns with their values and workplace preferences. This study explores these dual perspectives, analysing how Gen Z leaders emerge and how workplace leadership expectations shape their professional experiences

Raised amidst political, technological, and societal transformations, Gen Z prioritizes work-life

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balance, continuous learning, competitive salaries, and value-driven workplace cultures. However, they may also exhibit impatience and a preference for instant gratification, posing challenges in professional environments (Avolio *et al.*, 2009). Entrepreneurial leadership plays a critical role in fostering innovation and sustainable growth, and as the workforce evolves, organizations must adapt to Gen Z's expectations of authentic, inclusive, and transformational leadership.

The study underscores the pivotal role of entrepreneurial leadership in driving innovation and development. The future of entrepreneurship

appears promising, propelled by advancements in technology and a societal shift towards social enterprises prioritizing purpose over profit. Gen Z demonstrates a strong entrepreneurial drive and a penchant for innovation but may encounter obstacles in navigating the complexities of business initiation, operational management, and adaptation to evolving market dynamics and technological advancements' (Schroth, 2019).

This research integrates the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) to examine Gen Z's leadership traits, competencies, and expectations through an indigenous wisdom framework. Rooted in ancient Indian philosophy, ethics, governance, and leadership principles, IKS offers valuable insights into leadership constructs, decision-making, and problem-solving. By drawing from sources such as the Vedas, Arthashastra, and historical leadership figures, this study explores how traditional Indian leadership philosophies influence the leadership styles and expectations of Gen Z entrepreneurs and professionals.

The research adopts a constructivist approach to analyze common leadership traits, entrepreneurial competencies, and workplace expectations of Gen Z professionals in India. It investigates how Gen Z entrepreneurs develop leadership skills through innovation and self-driven initiatives, while Gen Z professionals seek mentorship, workplace inclusivity, and leadership styles that foster growth and engagement. By bridging traditional leadership wisdom with modern workplace dynamics, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Gen Z navigates leadership—both as emerging leaders and as professionals seeking leadership that resonates with their values.

The literature review reveals significant gaps in the understanding of leadership styles among Gen Z compared to previous generations, specifically within the context of Indian Knowledge System

(IKS). While substantial research has focused on leadership theories and entrepreneurial competencies, empirical studies comparing leadership traits and requirements between Gen Z entrepreneurs and working professionals are limited. Studies have shown that Gen Z prefers leaders who exhibit honesty, transparency, and authenticity, yet the influence of traditional Indian values on their leadership expectations remains underexplored. Additionally, the role of IKS in shaping leadership practices, including concepts like dharma (duty), karma (action), and seva (selfless service), is an under-researched area. There is also a need for a comparative analysis of Indian leadership models and Western leadership frameworks to better understand how Gen Z integrates both into their entrepreneurial and professional lives. These gaps open avenues for a more holistic understanding of Gen Z's leadership constructs, especially within India's unique socio-cultural context.

The research aims to explore the leadership constructs of Generation Z entrepreneurs and working professionals in India through the lens of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). In particular, it seeks to understand the leadership traits, preferences, and challenges of Gen Z in both entrepreneurial and workplace contexts. By focusing on the unique socio-cultural environment of India, the study will identify how IKS influences leadership approaches, especially considering traditional concepts such as dharma (duty), karma (action), and seva (selfless service). Additionally, the research will examine how these values inform Gen Z's leadership expectations and behaviors, providing a fresh perspective on leadership theories.

The study focuses on the leadership experiences of Gen Z individuals, looking at how they exhibit leadership as entrepreneurs and what they expect from leaders in the workplace. It also explores the leadership challenges that Gen Z entrepreneurs face

in their endeavors, alongside the leadership traits they prefer in their professional environments. Through qualitative methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and workshops, the research will gather rich, context-specific data to gain a deeper understanding of how Gen Z constructs meanings of leadership within the cultural context of India.

This research also aims to uncover emergent leadership traits that could potentially extend existing leadership theories. The study identifies these unique traits and address gaps in current leadership models by considering both the modern expectations of Gen Z and the influence of traditional Indian values. Furthermore, it contributes to future research directions that explore how leadership theories can evolve in response to generational shifts and cultural contexts.

Conceptual Background

This generation has grown up with digital technology and social media, and they have distinct attitudes and expectations towards work and leadership (*Mahapatra et al., 2022*). In India, Gen Z individuals are reported to have characteristics such as continuous learning, career advancement and growth, autonomy, greater flexibility, work-life balance, and entrepreneurial intentions. These characteristics suggest that Gen Z individuals may require a different approach to leadership development compared to previous generations.

The conceptual background for this research can be derived from several sources. The report "Building leaders for the next decade" provides insights into the attitudes and aspirations of Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z towards leadership. The report highlights the changing dynamics of the workplace and the need for companies to understand the leadership aspirations of the new entrants to the workforce. It also discusses the gap between how one generation wants to lead and how another generation wants to

be led, and the need to bridge this gap to allow for seamless integration and effective leadership in the multigenerational workplace.

The success of Gen Z entrepreneurs is not solely dependent on individual ambition but also on systemic support from academia, industry, and government. In another research paper "Entrepreneurial intentions of Gen Z university students and entrepreneurial constraints in Bangladesh" (*Hossain et al., 2023*) emphasize that financial constraints, particularly high-interest bank loans, act as a significant barrier for young entrepreneurs. Without accessible financing options, many Gen Z individuals are unable to translate their entrepreneurial intentions into viable businesses. Similarly, a lack of structured academia-industry-government collaboration results in skill gaps, limited mentorship opportunities, and an ecosystem that does not adequately support young founders.

This aligns with global trends where supportive ecosystems, such as those seen in Silicon Valley or Singapore, significantly boost youth entrepreneurship by fostering collaboration among universities, industries, and policymakers. Conversely, in many developing economies, these structural limitations continue to hinder entrepreneurial success, reinforcing the need for targeted policy interventions. These findings underscore the necessity for policymakers to create youth-friendly financial policies and for universities to strengthen industry ties to ensure that Gen Z entrepreneurs receive the support they need to thrive.

The article "Mr Ratan Tata - A Transformational Leader" provides insights into the leadership traits of Ratan Tata, a transformational leader who has successfully transformed the Tata Group from a local to an international brand. The article highlights the importance of vision, mission, core values, and organizational goals in determining the

successful sailing of any organization, and the crucial role of human resources and transformational leadership in achieving business excellence.

In another NHRD report "Gen Z: An Emerging Phenomenon", (Mahapatra et al., 2022) provides a comprehensive overview of Gen Z individuals, their characteristics, and their implications for companies. The report highlights the need for companies to understand the unique characteristics and aspirations of Gen Z individuals and to develop leadership theories that are tailored to their needs.

Gen Z is the first fully global generation, heavily influenced by the internet and social media. Known for their digital integration, global perspective, and social media presence, Gen Z is predicted to hold 18 jobs across 6 careers and live in 15 different homes throughout their lifetime. This cohort follows several others, including the Lost Generation (1883-1900), Greatest Generation (1901-1927), Silent Generation (1928-1945), Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), Millennials (1981-1996), and Generation Alpha (born 2010-2024). The text explores the differences between Gen Z and these earlier generations, based on research and various studies.

Evolving Work Values: How Gen Z Differs from Previous Generations

Gen Z individuals exhibit distinct work values and attitudes compared to earlier generations (Lev, 2021). Unlike Baby Boomers and Gen X, who valued job stability, structured career growth, and long-term commitment to organizations, Gen Z prioritizes *autonomy, transparency, and meaningful work*. They seek *purpose-driven careers* that align with their personal values, preferring organizations that demonstrate social responsibility and inclusivity.

A key differentiator of Gen Z's work approach is

their *preference for collaboration over hierarchy*. While previous generations often adhered to rigid corporate structures and top-down management styles, Gen Z favors *flat organizational structures*, where employees at all levels have a voice in decision-making. They respond well to *transformational leadership*, which emphasizes mentorship, innovation, and adaptability, rather than the transactional leadership style that was more common in earlier generations.

Additionally, the *digital-first mindset* of Gen Z has reshaped workplace expectations. Raised in the era of instant access to information, they value *real-time feedback, digital communication, and work-life integration* rather than traditional performance reviews or rigid 9-to-5 schedules. This generation is also more comfortable with *remote and hybrid work models*, emphasizing flexibility and results over physical presence in the office.

Another notable shift is their *expectation of workplace ethics and transparency*. Unlike Millennials, who spearheaded discussions around work-life balance, Gen Z takes it further by demanding *authentic leadership, mental well-being initiatives, and inclusivity in corporate policies*. They are *quick to disengage from organizations that lack clear ethical standards or fail to address social and environmental issues*.

Given these evolving work values, organizations must adapt their leadership and management strategies to retain and engage Gen Z employees effectively. Companies that offer *flexibility, open communication, career development opportunities, and a strong organizational purpose* will have a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining this dynamic workforce.

Gen Z's Entrepreneurial Drive in a VUCA World

Gen Z demonstrates a strong inclination toward entrepreneurship and self-employment,

distinguishing itself from previous generations that prioritized job security and long-term corporate careers (Schroth, 2019). In a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world, Gen Z entrepreneurs exhibit resilience, adaptability, and risk-taking abilities, leveraging their digital fluency, social consciousness, and networking capabilities to navigate unpredictable market conditions. Unlike their predecessors, they prioritize purpose-driven work, seeking businesses that align with their values, sustainability goals, and societal impact. Their entrepreneurial approach is heavily digital-first, utilizing AI, e-commerce, and social media to create scalable, and innovative business models. Additionally, they favor autonomy and flexibility, gravitating toward freelancing, gig work, and startups over traditional employment structures. However, despite their innovation and agility, Gen Z entrepreneurs face significant challenges such as access to funding, scalability concerns, and regulatory uncertainty. To support their aspirations, policymakers and industry leaders must provide mentorship programs, enhance entrepreneurial education, and expand funding opportunities tailored to young founders. By embracing agility, innovation, and impact-driven leadership, Gen Z entrepreneurs are not just adapting to change but actively shaping the future of business and the global economy.

Prioritizing Mental Health and Work-Life Balance: A Defining Trait of Gen Z

Gen Z places a heightened emphasis on mental health and work-life balance, marking a significant shift from previous generations that often prioritized job stability and career progression over personal well-being. Unlike Baby Boomers and Gen X, who traditionally accepted long working hours as a norm, Gen Z actively seeks workplaces that support psychological well-being, flexibility, and holistic growth. Research highlights that they are more likely to choose employers who offer mental health resources, flexible schedules, and

remote work options, prioritizing a culture that values employee wellness over rigid productivity metrics. Their openness to discussing mental health challenges and advocating for work-life integration has prompted organizations to rethink their policies, introducing well-being programs, mental health leaves, and stress management initiatives. Additionally, Gen Z's preference for boundary-setting and digital detoxes reflects their awareness of burnout risks, pushing companies to foster healthier work environments. However, this generation also faces challenges, such as navigating career growth while maintaining these boundaries and overcoming generational resistance to changing workplace expectations. To retain and engage Gen Z talent, businesses must adapt by integrating mental health support, fostering empathetic leadership, and promoting a culture where well-being is not just encouraged but embedded into organizational structures.

Purpose-Driven Work: Gen Z's Commitment beyond Financial Gains

Gen Z prioritizes purpose-driven work, seeking roles that align with their values and contribute to a larger societal impact beyond financial rewards (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). Unlike previous generations, who often valued job security and financial incentives as primary motivators, Gen Z is deeply invested in work that fosters innovation, social responsibility, and meaningful change. Research indicates that they are drawn to organizations with strong corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, sustainability efforts, and ethical business practices, favoring employers who demonstrate a genuine commitment to positive impact. This generation thrives in environments that offer project-driven assignments, real-world problem-solving opportunities, and professional growth. Their entrepreneurial mindset further reinforces this preference, as many Gen Z individuals aspire to build businesses that integrate profitability with

social good. However, organizations that fail to integrate purpose into their corporate culture risk disengagement and high turnover among Gen Z employees. To effectively engage and retain this workforce, businesses must foster transparent communication, provide opportunities for social impact involvement, and create leadership pathways that empower Gen Z to drive meaningful initiatives. By aligning organizational goals with their passion for purpose, companies can leverage the full potential of this values-driven generation (Barhate & Dirani, 2022).

Gen Z's Global Mindset: Redefining the Future of Work and Collaboration

Gen Z exhibits a strong global mindset, demonstrating heightened awareness of global issues and a collaborative approach that transcends geographical boundaries (Agustia et al., 2020). Unlike previous generations, who often operated within localized work environments, Gen Z seamlessly integrates digital connectivity with cross-cultural engagement, making them well-equipped to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world. Their exposure to diverse perspectives through social media, digital platforms, and international education has cultivated an openness to working with global teams and tackling challenges that extend beyond national borders.

This global orientation is reshaping workplace dynamics, as businesses must now adapt to a workforce that values inclusivity, cultural diversity, and ethical global practices. Companies are increasingly leveraging Gen Z's adaptability and digital fluency to drive international collaborations, remote work models, and cross-border entrepreneurship. Additionally, their concern for global sustainability, social justice, and ethical business operations suggests that future workplaces will prioritize corporate responsibility on a broader scale.

Organizations that wish to engage and retain Gen Z talent must embrace this shift by fostering culturally diverse teams, implementing flexible work arrangements, and adopting technology-driven collaboration tools that facilitate global interaction. As Gen Z continues to redefine the future of work, businesses that align with their globally conscious values will remain competitive in attracting and retaining top talent (Agustia et al., 2020).

The leadership theory for Gen Z entrepreneurs and working professionals in India diverges significantly from previous generations, characterized by their preference for *autonomy*, *transparency*, *meaningful work* (Lev, B. (2021)., *entrepreneurial spirit* (Schroth, H. (2019). (Barhate, B., & Dirani, K. (2022)., *focus on mental health and work-life balance* (Agut, S., Peiró, J. M., & Grau, R. (2020).), *self-awareness & purpose driven work* (Barhate, B., & Dirani, K. (2022)., and *global mindset* (Agustia, D., Sawitri, D. R., & Hadiyanto, H. (2020)). Organizations stand to benefit by recognizing and harnessing the potential of this dynamic generation to build successful, inclusive teams.

Gen Z leadership dynamics and the Indian Knowledge System

Leadership is a dynamic and evolving construct shaped by generational shifts, socio-cultural contexts, and economic transformations. Gen Z, the first truly digital-native generation, is redefining leadership paradigms through entrepreneurial innovation and workplace expectations. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z entrepreneurs are driven by purpose, autonomy, and technological fluency, while Gen Z professionals prioritize collaborative, inclusive, and value-driven leadership in their workplaces. These evolving perspectives necessitate a deeper exploration of leadership traits, competencies, and challenges specific to this generation.

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) provides a unique theoretical lens to examine Gen Z leadership by integrating insights from ancient Indian philosophical, ethical, and strategic frameworks. Classical texts such as the Arthashastra (on governance and statecraft), the Bhagavad Gita (on ethical leadership and decision-making), and Upanishadic teachings (on self-awareness and transformational leadership) offer valuable leadership models that emphasize dharma (duty), adaptability, and servant leadership. By applying IKS to Gen Z leadership constructs, this study seeks to bridge traditional wisdom with contemporary leadership expectations, providing a culturally nuanced understanding of leadership.

Existing literature suggests that Gen Z entrepreneurs exhibit leadership through innovation, adaptability, and risk-taking, but often struggle with uncertainty, operational complexities, and sustaining long-term vision. On the other hand, Gen Z professionals expect leadership that fosters mentorship, work-life balance, and career development but face challenges in aligning their expectations with organizational structures rooted in traditional leadership models. Understanding the common traits, competencies, and leadership expectations of Gen Z through an IKS-based approach enables a

holistic evaluation of how leadership manifests across entrepreneurial and corporate landscapes.

This conceptual foundation forms the basis of this study, which aims to explore Gen Z leadership through a *constructivist framework* (Gergen, K. J. (2009) (A. L. (2011). integrating *generational traits, workplace trends* (Twenge, J. M. (2017)(Schroth, H. (2019). and *Indian philosophical insights* (Sharma, S. (2001).(Ranganathananda, S. (2007).

The findings will contribute to existing leadership theories while offering context-specific strategies to nurture Gen Z leadership potential in both entrepreneurial and professional domains.

In summary, Generation Z and previous generations differ in terms of technology adoption due to their upbringing, tech skills, communication styles, attitudes towards privacy, and overall relationship with technology and digital tools. The research aims to bridge the gap between *how Gen Z individuals want to lead and how they want to be led* (Dool, 2019) and to construct a leadership theory that are tailored to the unique needs and aspirations of Gen Z entrepreneurs and working professionals in India.

Table 1: Review of Literature and Identification of Research Gaps

Theme	Key Findings from Literature	Research Gaps	Limitations
Startup Leadership & Contextual Factors	Leadership effectiveness is shaped by context (<i>Zaech & Baldegger, 2020</i>). Startups face high failure risks, complexity, and unpredictability (<i>Ouimet & Zarutskie, 2014; Sommer et al., 2009</i>). Young startups are highly flexible but lack experience (<i>Pellegrino et al., 2012</i>). Resistance to change increases as firms grow older (<i>Aldrich & Auster, 1985</i>).	Limited research on leadership strategies tailored to different startup growth stages. Need for empirical data on how leadership approaches shift as startups evolve. Lack of research on leadership adaptability in high-risk environments.	Many existing studies focus on Western startups, limiting insights into diverse entrepreneurial ecosystems.
Founder Leadership vs. Opportunity in Startups	VCs often attribute startup failures to founder incompetence rather than market opportunities (<i>Eisenmann, 2021</i>). Founders' leadership qualities, grit, and decision-making play a key role in startup success.	Limited research on balancing founder leadership development with external business factors. Need for empirical studies on leadership interventions to improve startup success rates.	Overemphasis on VC perspectives may overlook internal leadership dynamics and founder challenges.
Gen Z's Preference for Transformational Leadership	Gen Z prefers transformational leadership over transactional (<i>Bornman, 2019</i>). They respond positively to leaders who exhibit traditionally feminine traits like empathy and collaboration.	Need for more studies on how transformational leadership can be adapted to different workplace settings. Limited research on how gendered leadership traits influence Gen Z's perception of effective leadership.	Existing studies lack longitudinal analysis on how Gen Z's leadership preferences evolve overtime.
Authenticity, Transparency & Ethical Leadership	Gen Z values honesty, directness, and transparency in leaders (<i>Anderson et al., 2017; Tuglan, 2016</i>). They have a keen awareness of deception and expect ethical leadership (<i>Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022; Dorsey & Villa, 2020</i>).	Lack of research on how leaders can develop and maintain authenticity in digital and hybrid work environments. Need for empirical data on the long-term impact of transparent leadership on Gen Z retention.	Studies often rely on self-reported data, which may introduce bias in assessing leadership expectations.
Workplace Relationships & Leadership	Traditional top-down leadership is outdated; Gen Z prefers relational leadership, shared decision-making, and empowerment (<i>Spiegel, 2013</i>). Gen Zers expect trust and supportive leadership (<i>Workforce Institute at Kronos, 2019</i>). Poor leadership negatively impacts their productivity.	Limited research on how organizations can effectively transition from hierarchical to relational leadership. Need for case studies on successful mentorship-based leadership for Gen Z.	Lack of industry-specific insights into how workplace relationships affect different sectors.
Meaningful Work & Employee Engagement	Organizations must provide meaningful work to retain Gen Z employees (<i>Weeks & Schaffert, 2019</i>). Gen Z expects job satisfaction, work-life balance, and alignment with personal values.	Lack of studies on how leaders can create personalized, meaningful work experiences. Need for empirical data on the role of meaningful work in Gen Z employee retention.	Studies may generalize Gen Z expectations, overlooking variations based on industry and job role.

Gen Z's Preference for Socially Conscious Leadership	Gen Z is drawn to socially responsible organizations (<i>Chillakuri, 2020; Leslie et al., 2021</i>). They seek ethical alignment between a company's values and practices.	Limited research on how CSR initiatives impact Gen Z leadership styles and entrepreneurial ventures. Need for more empirical studies on the role of social consciousness in Gen Z's business decision-making.	Lack of concrete data on the long-term business impact of socially responsible leadership.
Indian Knowledge System (IKS) & Leadership	Indian leadership philosophies emphasize ethics, strategic thinking, and adaptability (<i>Kautilya, 2000</i>). Dharma (duty) and self-awareness shape leadership motivation (<i>Kumar, 2019</i>). Yoga and meditation enhance self-leadership and stress management (<i>Goyal & Raj, 2017</i>).	Limited research on how IKS influences Gen Z leadership styles in professional and entrepreneurial settings. Need for comparative studies between IKS and Western leadership frameworks. Lack of empirical evidence on IKS principles improving leadership effectiveness in modern workplaces.	Most research on IKS and leadership is theoretical, lacking empirical validation.
Gen Z's Entrepreneurial Competencies & Higher Education	Research calls for an entrepreneurial competency framework (<i>Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2010</i>). Higher education institutions must develop specific entrepreneurship skills (<i>Robles & Zárraga-Rodríguez, 2015</i>).	Lack of studies linking entrepreneurial education with real-world business success among Gen Z. Need for empirical data on how education systems can enhance Gen Z's entrepreneurial leadership competencies.	Most studies focus on structured education but ignore informal learning pathways and self-taught entrepreneurship.
Cultural Context & Leadership Preferences	Gen Z's leadership preferences vary across cultures (<i>Alya et al., 2021</i>). Many studies focus on specific regions, limiting generalizability.	Need for cross-cultural research comparing Gen Z leadership expectations across different geographic locations. Lack of studies on how digital transformation influences leadership effectiveness in a globalized world.	Lack of diversity in sample populations, leading to potential regional biases.
Comparing Leadership Across Generations	Leadership expectations differ between Gen Z and Millennials (<i>Lanier, 2010</i>). Millennials and Gen Z both demand transparency, but Gen Z has stronger ethical and social consciousness expectations.	Need for comparative studies on leadership expectations of Gen Z vs. Millennials across different industries. Limited research on external factors (technology, globalization) shaping Gen Z leadership styles.	Most studies focus on general trends rather than industry-specific leadership differences.
Limitations in Leadership Research on Gen Z	Leadership research often focuses on founder-CEOs from an employee perspective, potentially leading to bias (<i>Zaech & Baldegger, 2017</i>). Most studies focus on students rather than Gen Z employees (<i>Barhate & Dirani, 2021</i>).	Need for direct studies on Gen Z employees and entrepreneurs in leadership roles. Lack of empirical data on how Gen Z adapts leadership styles in real-world scenarios.	Many studies rely on cross-sectional data rather than longitudinal insights into evolving leadership trends.

Hybrid Leadership Models (Traditional vs. Modern)	Gen Z integrates authenticity, inclusivity, and ethical leadership but also seeks innovation and adaptability (<i>Brown, 2023</i>).	Need for research exploring hybrid leadership models that blend traditional leadership wisdom (e.g., Bhagavad Gita, Arthashastra) with modern approaches. Limited empirical studies on how ethical leadership influences Gen Z's workplace decision-making.	Limited empirical research on how hybrid models can be effectively implemented across industries.
Future Research Recommendations for Leadership & Entrepreneurship	Future research should explore the ranking of entrepreneurial competencies, the relationship between entrepreneurial and managerial competencies, and the impact of personal variables on business success (<i>Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2010</i>). Empirical studies are needed on how education fosters entrepreneurship (<i>Robles & Zárraga-Rodríguez, 2015</i>).	Need for research exploring long-term leadership development strategies tailored for Gen Z entrepreneurs. Lack of studies on how Indian spiritual and cultural values (yoga, mindfulness) influence Gen Z's leadership preferences and work-life balance.	Limited focus on real-world business case studies integrating research recommendations.
Gen Z's Leadership & The Indian Knowledge System (IKS)	Limited studies on how IKS influences Gen Z leadership in corporate and entrepreneurial settings. Gen Z seeks leadership that balances ethics, resilience, and innovation. Dharma, karma, and seva influence leadership motivation.	Need for research on how IKS principles shape leadership styles in startups and corporations. Limited studies on how Gen Z integrates IKS with Western leadership models.	IKS-based leadership studies often lack quantitative validation, relying heavily on qualitative interpretations.

Research Methodology

The research methodology applied is Grounded theory, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), to explore leadership constructs rather than test existing theories. This approach is well-suited for understanding how Generation Z (Gen Z) leaders navigate their professional environments, particularly through the lens of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS).

Key elements of grounded theory include constant comparison and theoretical sampling (Shepherd & Suddaby, 2017). Data collection and analysis occur simultaneously, ensuring emerging themes guide further data collection.

The study follows constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 1996), which emphasizes the researcher's role in interpreting participant experiences.

Research Design

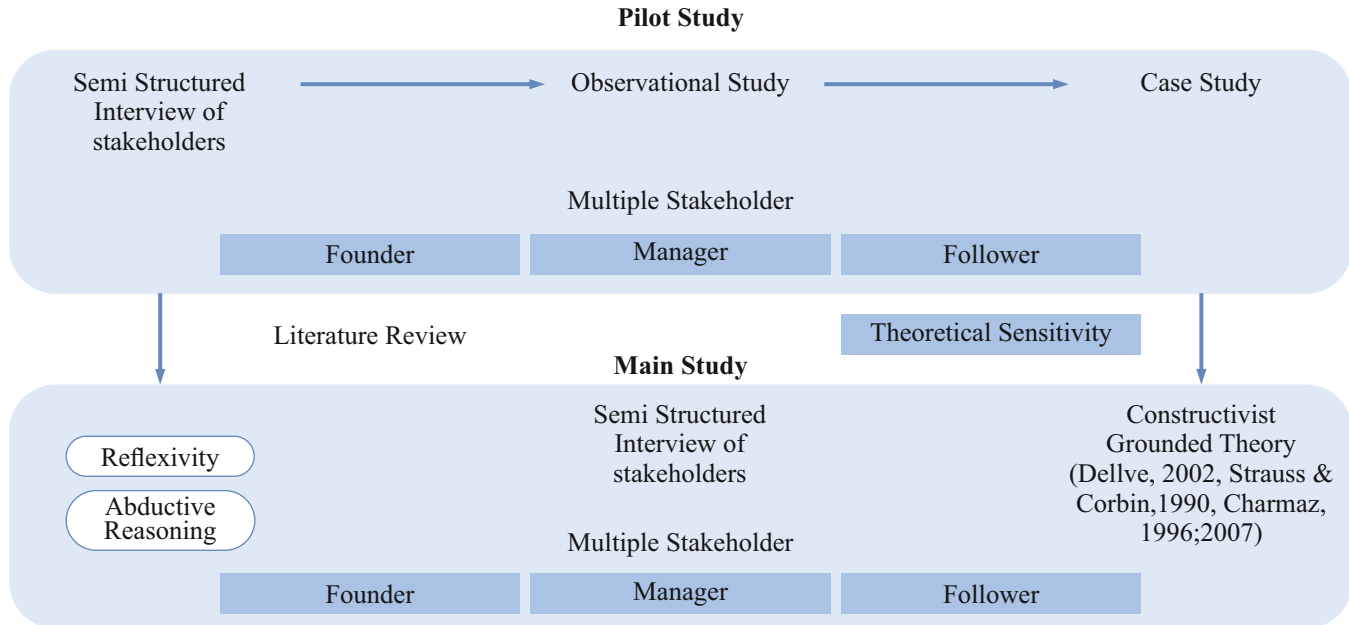


Figure 1: Schematic representation of Research Design

The research follows a qualitative approach using a combination of pilot and main studies to explore leadership perspectives among multiple stakeholders—founders, managers, and followers—within entrepreneurial settings. The pilot study serves as an exploratory phase, incorporating semi-structured interviews, observational studies, and case study analysis to refine the research approach. Insights from this phase enhance theoretical sensitivity and inform the structure of the main study. A comprehensive literature review is conducted to establish a theoretical foundation, ensuring that the study remains grounded in existing research while allowing new themes to emerge. The main study builds upon the pilot findings and employs semi-structured interviews with multiple stakeholders,

utilizing the Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) methodology as outlined by Delle (2002), Strauss & Corbin (1990), and Charmaz (1996, 2007). The research incorporates reflexivity to account for researcher biases and applies abductive reasoning to iteratively analyze data, refine concepts, and connect empirical findings with theoretical frameworks. This research design enables a comprehensive exploration of leadership within entrepreneurial contexts, balancing empirical evidence and theoretical development through qualitative methods. The combination of pilot and main studies, semi-structured interviews, case studies, and grounded theory ensures a robust and nuanced understanding of leadership dynamics in start-ups.

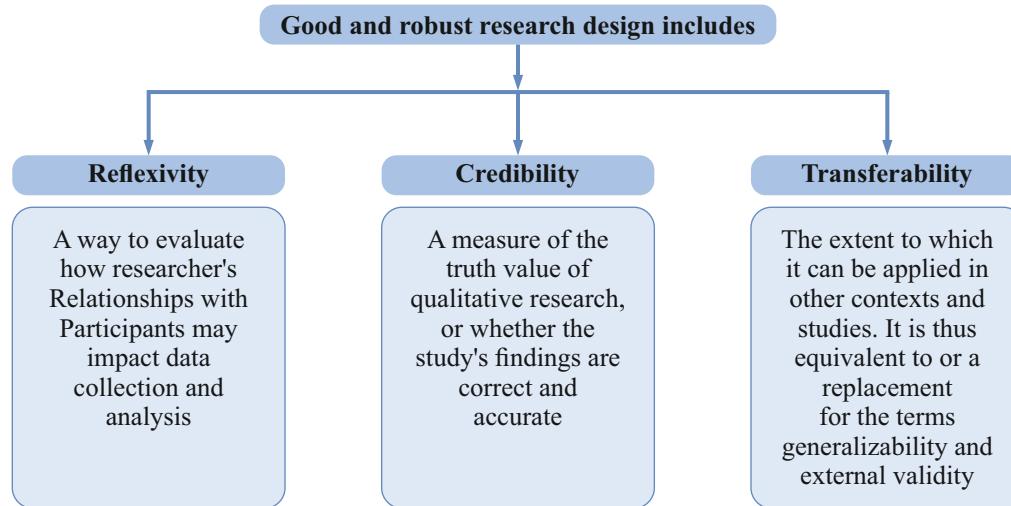


Fig 2 : The inclusion of Reflexivity, Credibility and Transferability as part of the Research Study

Data Collection Methods

The data collection for this study employs a qualitative approach, primarily utilizing semi-structured interviews to gain in-depth insights into Gen Z entrepreneurs and professionals regarding their leadership perceptions, challenges, and the influence of traditional Indian values on their leadership styles. These interviews are designed to be flexible yet structured, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences while ensuring consistency across responses. To obtain a holistic understanding, additional interviews are conducted with leadership mentors and managers who work closely with Gen Z professionals. Their perspectives help uncover how workplaces adapt to Gen Z leadership expectations, highlighting areas of alignment or friction between generational leadership styles.

The data collection process for this study adopts a qualitative research approach, incorporating semi-structured interviews with Gen Z entrepreneurs and professionals from startups and mid-sized enterprises. The selection criteria ensure participants are drawn from startups that have been operating for a minimum of two years across product, service, IT, and manufacturing sectors. The study includes businesses funded either

through angel investors or self-funding, providing a diverse entrepreneurial landscape.

To ensure comprehensive representation, the study accounts for individual differences such as personality traits, openness to new experiences, socio-economic background, and exposure to diverse work environments. Additionally, diversity factors such as age, gender, and nationality are considered to gain a well-rounded understanding of Gen Z entrepreneurs. The study also explores contextual challenges, including family and community cultural influences, differences between traditional and new-age businesses, and the entrepreneurial background of participants, distinguishing between those from business families and first-time entrepreneurs.

The data collection process includes obtaining informed consent from all respondents, ensuring ethical research practices. The interviews are conducted both online and offline, depending on the availability and preferences of participants. All interviews are audio-recorded with prior consent, and later transcribed for data analysis to maintain accuracy and reliability. Additionally, insights from leadership mentors and managers provide an external perspective on how workplaces adapt to Gen Z leadership expectations, ensuring a multi-

stakeholder view. This holistic approach enables a detailed exploration of the leadership styles, challenges, and growth trajectories of Gen Z entrepreneurs in a rapidly evolving business environment.

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling method is initially used to select diverse Gen Z leaders, followed by theoretical sampling as data analysis progresses. Thematic saturation will determine the final sample size, estimated to range from 35 to 50 participants.

Data Analysis

The study employs coding techniques as outlined by Corbin and Strauss (1990) to systematically analyze qualitative data. Open coding is used to identify key themes from interview transcripts, followed by axial coding, which categorizes related themes to establish meaningful connections. Selective coding is then applied to integrate core categories, leading to the development of theoretical constructs. Data saturation, as defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is achieved when no new themes emerge from additional data collection. To ensure methodological rigor, the study also incorporates Saunders et al.'s (2018) four

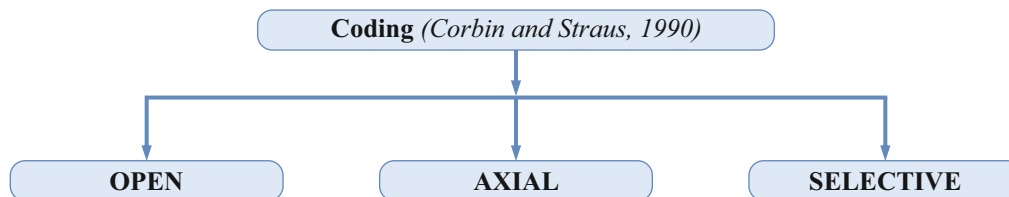


Fig 4: Schematic representation of Triangulation utilised in the research for validity

Memo Writing and Reflexivity

Memo writing is the intermediate step between coding and the first draft of completed analysis (Charmaz, K, 1996). According to Glaser (2013) “memos will vary in subject, coherence, interest, theoretical content, conceptual clarity, and future usefulness to a finished paper”. Memo writing ensures quality grounded theory (Bryan, 2016) (Birks & Mills, 2015) and helps in establishing “Reflexivity” (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023).

- Literature on leadership theories and IKS in the Indian context.
- Analysis of cultural and societal factors influencing leadership.

This methodology provides a robust framework to explore leadership constructs among Gen Z leaders in India, integrating traditional and contemporary perspectives for a comprehensive analysis.

Sources of Data

- Interviews with Gen Z entrepreneurs and corporate professionals in India.

Findings

Table 2 : Insights from Respondents and Literature on Gen Z entrepreneurial competencies, challenges and expectations.

Entrepreneur	Company	Source	What Gen Z Means to Them	Entrepreneurial Competencies	Why Startups for Gen Z?	Challenges	Expectations
Bhavish Aggarwal	OLA	Literature Review	Independent, ambitious, impact-driven, innovation-focused	Risk-taking, adaptability, problem-solving	Challenge conventions, build sustainable solutions	Regulatory hurdles, scaling issues	Focus on long-term sustainability, policy reforms
Nikhil Kamath	ZERODHA	Literature Review	Digitally native, analytical, financially independent	Financial acumen, strategic thinking	Data-driven, disrupt traditional industries	Trust-building, competition, market conservatism	Self-learning, balance idealism with execution
Kunal Shah	CRED	Literature Review	Skeptical of traditional systems, values transparency	Consumer psychology, networking, bold decision-making	Disrupt legacy institutions, customer focus	Scaling, brand loyalty, financial constraints	Understand consumer behavior, patience in scaling
Vineeta Singh	SUGAR	Literature Review	Passionate about branding, lifestyle-driven, value-aligned	Branding, digital marketing, resilience	Build brands that resonate with identity	Market saturation, funding issues	Authenticity, community-driven marketing
Tarun Mehta	ATHER ENERGY	Personal Interview	Eco-conscious, ambitious, purpose-driven	Engineering, sustainability, innovation	Solve global issues like climate change	High R&D costs, regulatory barriers	Deep-tech innovation, long-term vision
Abhishek	ARKIN LABS	Personal Interview	Self-aware, values flexibility, mental health conscious	Thrives on disruption, breaking business models	Create meaningful change in sustainability & tech	Lack of experience, early-stage funding issues	Focus, experiment, and iterate
Akash	AUTUN X	Personal Interview	Values autonomy, purpose-driven work	Sees failure as a learning process	Embraces uncertainty, quick pivots in startups	Access to funding, building scalable teams	Execution beats ideas, adaptability is key
Divya	VIDHAI	Personal Interview	Digital-native, socially conscious, seeks authenticity	Emphasizes ecosystems over just products	Uses tech to enhance efficiency & scale globally	Balancing growth with financial sustainability	Start now, learning by doing
Sudarsanan	THE SOCIAL COMPANY	Personal Interview	Prefers collaborative leadership, avoids hierarchy	Leverages technology for business operations	Flat structures, teamwork over hierarchy	Work-life balance, resilience under pressure	Mentorship is crucial for reducing mistakes
Maitri	THE LEFT STORE	Personal Interview	Lifelong learning, self-education, purpose-driven	Holds companies accountable, ethical decision-making	Customer feedback & continuous improvement	Market skepticism, resistance from established players	Failure is a step to success

Table 3 : Insights from Respondents Gen Z working professionals expected competencies, challenges and expectations

Position	Work Location	Organisation	Gen Z Characteristics	Expected Leadership Competencies @ Workplace	Generational Differences	What Makes Workplace Interesting	Workplace Motivation to Take More Challenges	What Do You Value in a Leader
Vishal	Chennai	Not to Disclose	Restless, Immediate gratification, Social Savvy	Freedom to work, More as a mentor, understand personal Space	It is "yes" , Will engage in meaningful conversation	When work is fun, WLB	Recognition, To be inspired, Learning edge	Trust, Openness, and Appreciation
Wasim	Hyderabad	Not to Disclose	Window Shopping, Like to explore new places	Self-respect, Value to work	HODs want us to think like them	Work-life balance, Employee Benefits	Progressive and innovative workplace	Good-natured, supportive
Jotheeswaran	Chennai	Exer Solutions (Project Management)	Tech-savvy, values efficiency and digital communication	Honesty, autonomy, adaptability, inclusivity, emotional intelligence	Prefers participatory leadership; older leaders struggle with adapting to digital-first work culture	Flexible work environment, opportunity to learn and contribute	Growth-oriented environment, mentorship, freedom in decision-making	Transparency, trust, and empowerment
Niranjana	Chennai	Senior Manager & Business Owner	Independent, entrepreneurial, seeks dynamic work	Approachable, mentorship-driven, empowerment-based leadership	Older leaders resist new ideas; workplace politics slows progress	Strategic problem-solving, autonomy, innovation opportunities	Direct communication, result-driven work, acknowledgment of contributions	Leadership as guidance rather than authority
Vijay	Chennai	Banking & Printing Industry	Prefers flexibility, dislikes rigid hierarchies	Open-minded, supportive, digitally competent leaders	Older leaders rely on traditional methods; Gen Z prefers direct communication	Engaging tasks, space for creative input	Feeling valued, being heard, professional development	Empathy, transparency, and digital fluency

Based on the insights from the respondents, the study identifies the following key findings:

- Gen Z entrepreneurs are driven by purpose, impact, and autonomy. Unlike previous generations, they do not pursue entrepreneurship purely for financial success but to create meaningful change.
- They heavily leverage technology and digital tools. The use of digital marketing, data analytics, and automation is a common trend among Gen Z startups.
- Financial literacy is a crucial competency. Many young entrepreneurs prioritize financial independence and adopt strategic thinking to navigate economic challenges.
- Workplace culture and leadership styles are shifting. Flat hierarchies, peer mentorship, and flexible work structures define their leadership preferences.
- Challenges in funding, scalability, and industry resistance remain prevalent. While they bring innovation, gaining credibility and financial backing remains difficult.
- Resilience and adaptability are central themes. Many entrepreneurs view failure as a learning opportunity and emphasize continuous improvement.
- Long-term vision and sustainability are prioritized over short-term profitability. Unlike traditional business approaches, they value steady and ethical growth.

These findings underscore the evolving nature of entrepreneurship among Gen Z, highlighting their focus on impact, adaptability, and community engagement. This research highlights Gen Z entrepreneurs' motivations, challenges, and expectations were they redefine entrepreneurship by blending personal fulfilment, tech innovation, social responsibility, prioritizing financial independence and sustainability. Despite hurdles like funding and scalability, their resilience helps them adapt. Support through mentorship, financial aid, and policy reforms can drive their success.

Discussion

The findings reveal that Gen Z entrepreneurs exhibit a strong inclination towards independence, purpose-driven work, and innovation. Unlike previous generations, they prioritize autonomy, personal branding, and leveraging technology to disrupt traditional business models. Their emphasis on financial independence and impact-driven careers aligns with their skepticism towards conventional employment structures.

Gen Z entrepreneurs are highly self-aware and reject rigid work environments. They expect businesses to prioritize flexibility, mental well-being, and purpose-driven missions. The prevalence of collaborative leadership styles highlights their preference for peer-driven mentorship over hierarchical authority. Additionally, their demand for authenticity extends to consumer behavior, making them more receptive to community-driven business models.

Entrepreneurial Competencies of Gen Z

The study highlights a range of competencies that define Gen Z entrepreneurs. These include:

- **Risk-taking and adaptability:** They demonstrate a willingness to challenge existing business norms and embrace change.

- **Financial acumen:** Many entrepreneurs, such as those in the fintech sector, focus on economic independence and data-driven decision-making.
- **Technology-driven strategies:** Leveraging digital tools and data analytics is a common competency, enabling efficient business scaling.
- **Brand-building and consumer engagement:** Entrepreneurs place significant importance on storytelling, authenticity, and creating personal connections with consumers.
- **Resilience and problem-solving:** Their ability to pivot and find solutions amidst uncertainties is a distinguishing characteristic.

These competencies align with the broader trend of digital transformation and the increasing importance of purpose-driven enterprises in today's economy.

Why Startups Appeal to Gen Z

Gen Z sees startups as a means to address inefficiencies in traditional markets and create innovative, high-impact solutions. The study finds that many entrepreneurs are motivated by:

- A desire to challenge legacy institutions and introduce customer-centric alternatives.
- The need to create businesses that align with personal values, such as sustainability, social justice, and mental well-being.
- Opportunities to leverage technology for automation, efficiency, and personalization.

Unlike prior generations that viewed startups primarily as economic endeavors, Gen Z integrates personal fulfillment, societal impact, and financial

success into their business motivations.

Challenges Faced by Gen Z Entrepreneurs

Despite their innovative approach, Gen Z entrepreneurs encounter several challenges:

- **Regulatory and market barriers:** Complex regulations and high entry costs, especially in fintech and sustainability sectors, pose significant hurdles.
- **Funding constraints:** Many founders struggle to secure initial investment without an established track record.
- **Building scalable teams:** While many startups begin with close-knit teams, transitioning to structured, scalable organizations remains a challenge.
- **Market skepticism:** Disruptive ideas often face resistance from industry incumbents and skeptical consumers.
- **Work-life balance and resilience:** The pressure to grow rapidly often leads to stress, burnout, and financial uncertainties.

These challenges suggest a need for targeted support mechanisms such as mentorship programs, policy interventions, and financial incentives tailored to young entrepreneurs.

Expectations and Strategies for Success

The study finds that Gen Z entrepreneurs emphasize long-term vision over short-term gains. Their key expectations include:

- **Sustainable business growth:** Rather than prioritizing rapid scaling, they focus on maintaining authenticity and brand trust.

- **Mentorship and peer learning:** Many entrepreneurs highlight the importance of learning from experienced founders.

- **Resilience and adaptability:** They recognize that failure is an essential part of the entrepreneurial journey and stress the importance of iteration.

- **Policy reforms:** They seek regulatory environments that support innovation, particularly in high-barrier industries like fintech and sustainability.

These insights indicate that Gen Z entrepreneurs value experiential learning, adaptability, and purpose-driven leadership as essential components of business success.

Gen Z Entrepreneurs vs. Gen Z Working Professionals: A Shift in Career Mindset

The research highlights significant differences between Gen Z entrepreneurs and Gen Z working professionals in terms of career motivations, workplace expectations, leadership styles, and challenges. While both groups exhibit strong values of independence, digital fluency, and purpose-driven work, their approaches to professional growth and business engagement differ considerably.

Motivations and Career Priorities

Gen Z entrepreneurs prioritize autonomy, financial independence, and the pursuit of meaningful change through innovation. They are highly inclined toward disrupting traditional industries and establishing businesses that align with their values. In contrast, Gen Z working professionals seek fulfillment through work-life balance, mentorship, and an engaging workplace culture. They value personal growth within structured environments rather than venturing into high-risk

entrepreneurship.

Leadership and Workplace Expectations

Entrepreneurs in this generation prefer flat hierarchies, collaborative leadership, and peer-driven mentorship, as seen in their preference for self-managed and adaptable work environments. On the other hand, Gen Z professionals expect leadership that provides guidance, flexibility, and trust while allowing autonomy. They appreciate leaders who act as mentors and foster inclusive, engaging workplaces.

Challenges Faced by Both Groups

While entrepreneurs struggle with regulatory barriers, funding constraints, and market skepticism, working professionals face challenges related to leadership dynamics, workplace motivation, and generational differences. Entrepreneurs must navigate financial uncertainty and industry resistance, whereas employees deal with adapting to traditional workplace structures that often clash with their expectations.

Technology and Work Culture

Both groups heavily rely on technology but in different ways. Entrepreneurs leverage digital tools for business scaling, branding, and consumer engagement, while professionals use technology to enhance workplace efficiency and collaboration. The commonality lies in their digital fluency and the expectation of technological integration in their respective environments.

Based on the analysis, the study identifies the following key findings:

- **Autonomy vs. Stability:** Gen Z entrepreneurs actively seek autonomy and financial control, whereas professionals prefer stability with flexibility.
- **Leadership Preferences Differ:** Entrepreneurs thrive in decentralized, peer-driven mentorship structures, while professionals value leaders who mentor and create positive workplace cultures.
- **Technology Utilization:** Both groups leverage digital tools, but entrepreneurs focus on business scaling while professionals seek workplace efficiency.
- **Purpose-Driven Work:** Both prioritize impact-driven careers but approach it differently—entrepreneurs build businesses with societal influence, while professionals seek meaning within organizational roles.
- **Challenges Vary:** Entrepreneurs deal with funding and market resistance, while professionals struggle with leadership engagement and motivation in structured settings.
- **Work-Life Balance Perception:** Professionals emphasize work-life balance, while entrepreneurs tend to accept high workloads and uncertainty in pursuit of long-term vision.

This research provides a nuanced understanding of Gen Z's leadership, entrepreneurial mindset, and workplace expectations, highlighting both alignments and gaps with existing literature. Prior research emphasizes that leadership effectiveness is highly contextual (*Zaech & Baldegger, 2020*), a notion reinforced by this study as it reveals that Gen Z adapts leadership styles based on career pathways. While Gen Z entrepreneurs embrace innovation, autonomy, and disruptive thinking, working professionals focus on flexibility, mentorship, and value-driven leadership. This bifurcation aligns with (*Eisenmann's (2021)*) insights, which suggest that startup success is often attributed to founder leadership rather than external market factors, yet this study extends the discourse

by showcasing how Gen Z professionals are transforming corporate leadership structures from within.

Further, the preference for transformational leadership among Gen Z (*Bornman, 2019*) is supported in this study, particularly in how they expect ethical, transparent, and empathetic leadership (*Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022*). However, the research expands on this by illustrating how entrepreneurs and professionals differ in their application of transformational leadership—entrepreneurs internalize it as personal passion and vision-driven leadership, while professionals expect it from their organizations and supervisors. This distinction offers a practical dimension to (*Dorsey & Villa's (2020)*) assertion that Gen Z seeks leaders with strong ethical grounding.

In alignment with *Aldrich & Auster (1985)*, this study reaffirms that as organizations mature, resistance to change increases, presenting challenges for Gen Z professionals advocating for flexibility in traditional corporate settings. Meanwhile, Gen Z entrepreneurs, unrestricted by legacy systems, integrate adaptability as a core business strategy, supporting (*Mitchelmore & Rowley's (2010)*) call for an entrepreneurial competency framework. However, unlike prior research, this study underscores the role of personality variables, socio-economic background, and family culture in shaping Gen Z leadership. Entrepreneurs from business family backgrounds exhibit higher confidence in risk-taking, while first-generation entrepreneurs emphasize resilience and strategic decision-making, adding depth to leadership research that often generalizes Gen Z as a monolithic group.

Melissa Cardon's "Entrepreneurial Passion" framework is validated in this study, emphasizing that passion is central to Gen Z entrepreneurship, yet this study broadens the perspective by

integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into the discussion.

The principles of Dharma, karma, and seva, rooted in Indian leadership philosophies (*Kautilya, 2000; Kumar, 2019*), subtly influence Gen Z's approach to leadership. While prior research on IKS remains largely theoretical, this study bridges the gap by demonstrating how Gen Z integrates traditional values with modern business strategies, a hybrid approach missing in Western leadership models.

Moreover, while Workforce Institute at (*Kronos (2019)*) highlights Gen Z's demand for trust and empowerment, this study refines the argument by showing that entrepreneurs manifest this through self-driven leadership, whereas professionals expect it as organizational culture reinforcement. The research also addresses the gaps in leadership studies that often prioritize employee perspectives (*Zaech & Baldegger, 2017*) or focus on students rather than active Gen Z professionals (*Barhate & Dirani, 2021*). This study, by analyzing real-world entrepreneurs and working professionals, bridges this gap, offering an empirical perspective on how Gen Z translates leadership ideals into action.

Given these insights, two strategic directions emerge for businesses and policymakers:

- Supporting Gen Z Entrepreneurs – Regulatory ease, accessible funding models (Angel Investors, Own Funding), and mentorship programs will help foster entrepreneurial success and innovation.
- Reshaping Corporate Leadership Models – Organizations must transition from rigid hierarchical leadership to relational, empowerment-driven structures that align with Gen Z's demand for purpose-driven work and transparency.

While literature acknowledges that Gen Z

integrates ethics, inclusivity, and digital proficiency (*Brown, 2023*), this study advances the conversation by demonstrating how these qualities manifest differently across entrepreneurial and professional pathways. By integrating leadership adaptability, hybrid models of IKS and Western leadership, and contextual influences, this research offers a comprehensive framework for understanding and supporting Gen Z leaders in both startup and corporate ecosystems.

Conclusion

This research highlights the evolving career landscape of Gen Z, showcasing distinct differences and similarities between entrepreneurs and working professionals. While both groups emphasize purpose, adaptability, and digital proficiency, their career paths diverge based on risk appetite, leadership expectations, and workplace structures.

Gen Z entrepreneurs are reshaping industries by prioritizing innovation and personal branding, while professionals are redefining corporate work culture through demands for flexibility, mentorship, and engagement. Organizations need to adapt by fostering environments that support autonomy, innovative thinking, technological integration, and leadership models that cater to Gen Z's expectations.

The research findings reveal a complex and evolving generational identity within Gen Z, where trust issues among peers, distinct sub-generations, and differentiated responses based on tier-city backgrounds are reshaping traditional workplace and entrepreneurial dynamics. Unlike prior generations, Maslow's hierarchy of needs appears to be shifting, with basic needs often being deprioritized in favor of self-actualization, digital influence, and purpose-driven careers. This generation places significant emphasis on work-life balance, recognizing the importance of

relaxation and revival over the conventional hustle culture that prioritized long working hours and financial stability above all else. The changing mindset signals a shift towards valuing mental well-being and personal fulfillment as key career priorities.

Parenting plays a crucial role in shaping Gen Z's values, leadership style, and career choices. Unlike past generations, they have been raised with greater independence, open communication, and early decision-making, fostering confidence and autonomy. Exposure to technology from a young age has enhanced their adaptability and problem-solving skills, making them comfortable with rapid change and digital transformation. While supportive parenting has encouraged entrepreneurial and leadership aspirations, highly structured upbringing has also led some to struggle with unstructured work environments. This balance of independence, digital exposure, and cultural shifts has shaped a generation that values purpose, innovation, and collaboration over traditional hierarchies.

Unlike previous generations that adapted to technology gradually, Gen Z demands digital fluency in leaders and expects organizations to integrate digital leadership strategies effectively. Leadership is no longer about hierarchy and authority; rather, it is about collaboration, open conversations, and shared decision-making. They expect leaders to engage in meaningful dialogue rather than issuing directives from the top down.

Another distinct characteristic of Gen Z is their inclination toward deep, constructive conversations. Unlike past generations who may have relied on structured meetings and formal communication, Gen Z prefers continuous engagement through discussions, debates, and digital interactions. This has made traditional corporate communication strategies less effective, as engaging Gen Z requires a conversational and participatory approach. Their unique

terminologies, social bonding methods, and digital-first nature often challenge older generations, creating a noticeable generational gap that sometimes results in misunderstandings or friction in professional environments. However, rather than resisting these shifts, organizations must acknowledge that Gen Z has the ability to push other generations out of their comfort zones, ultimately fostering a more innovative and inclusive work culture.

There is also an emerging recognition that Gen Z is not a homogenous group but consists of sub-groups with varying priorities, behaviors, and expectations based on socio-economic backgrounds and regional influences. Their responses and reflections differ significantly between metropolitan, tier-2, and tier-3 cities, reinforcing the need for a more nuanced approach when addressing their aspirations and leadership expectations.

As the influence of Gen Z grows in both entrepreneurship and corporate spaces, academic research on the subject has witnessed a sharp increase. The rising volume of studies indicates a collective recognition of the need to understand and adapt to this generation's unique work ethic, leadership expectations, and career motivations. The findings of this study reinforce the necessity for organizations and policymakers to rethink traditional workplace structures, leadership models, and engagement strategies to align with the evolving values of Gen Z.

Limitations

The limitations of existing research on Gen Z leadership stem from several key gaps. Many studies are Western-centric, limiting insights into diverse entrepreneurial ecosystems, particularly in emerging markets like India. Research often overemphasizes investor and external perspectives, neglecting internal leadership

dynamics and founder challenges. Additionally, while Gen Z's preference for transformational, ethical, and socially conscious leadership is well-documented, most studies lack longitudinal analysis, making it difficult to track how these preferences evolve over time. There is also a lack of industry-specific insights, as most studies focus on broad trends rather than sector-specific leadership challenges. Furthermore, research on Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and leadership remains largely theoretical, with limited empirical validation. Similarly, while entrepreneurial education and leadership development are widely studied, there is insufficient evidence linking them to real-world business success. Finally, cross-cultural comparisons of Gen Z leadership remain underexplored, with many studies relying on self-reported data, which may introduce bias and limit generalizability.

Future Research

Future research should explore Gen Z's career transitions, examining how they navigate between traditional employment and entrepreneurship over time. Additionally, investigating the role of emerging technologies like AI, blockchain, and automation will provide insights into their impact on both Gen Z-led businesses and corporate workplaces. Cross-cultural comparisons can help determine whether these entrepreneurial and workplace trends are universal or influenced by regional and cultural factors. Moreover, studying mental well-being and resilience will be crucial in understanding the psychological challenges Gen Z faces, enabling the development of better support systems for their entrepreneurial and professional journeys. Future research should also examine evolving consumer behaviours and technology's role in shaping their ventures, helping stakeholders create an environment for Gen Z to drive meaningful global change.

By continuing to study these areas, researchers, policymakers, and business leaders can create a

supportive ecosystem that enables Gen Z to thrive, whether as entrepreneurs or professionals navigating structured workplaces.

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