# The Hidden Potential of Generation X

Comparing Gen X Leaders with Millennials and Boomers

Who is the next generation of leaders, and how will they impact the nature of work? As the largest generation in the workforce, Millennials are ascending into new leadership roles, but it's Gen X-ers, or those born between 1965 and 1981, who hold the majority of leadership roles globally. With an average of 20 years of workplace experience, they are primed to assume nearly all top executive roles over the next decade, yet little has been known about what defines this generation's leadership strengths and experiences.

We found in *Global Leadership Forecast 2018* that there are important distinctions about how this generation is taking the reins. Some of these findings challenge commonly-held generational stereotypes and assumptions, including whether the youngest in the workforce are the most impatient to lead. How are Gen X-ers different from their Millennial and Baby Boomer counterparts, and how are they similar? Read on to find out.

Challenging the Digital Divide

Millennials are often dubbed the digital generation in the workplace, but data from more than 25,000 leaders challenges the assumption that digital skill is unique to one generation. Gen X leaders (54 percent) are just as confident in their digital leadership skills, on par with 56 percent of Millennials. Although the majority of both generations are digitally savvy, they demonstrate it differently in two critical leadership skills. Gen X leaders are far more likely to rate themselves as highly effective in their ability to lead virtual teams, whereas more Millennials indicate that they are effective leveraging technology to lead.

54%
Generation X
leaders are digitally savvy, on pace with Millennials at 56%

43% Generation X
Leading virtual teams (forming, guiding, and motivating remote or dispersed teams)

45% Millennials
Leading with digitization (leveraging technology) to more effectively manage the workforce
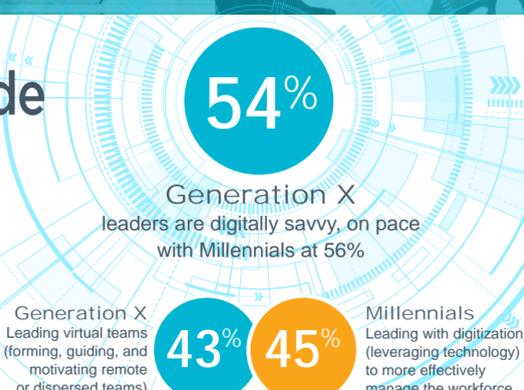
Leading with Empathy

Amidst an increased presence of machines and technology in our daily lives, empathy—the ability to understand and share others' feelings—remains a uniquely human skill that is demonstrated by great leaders. It's also a skill that Gen X leaders are significantly more confident at demonstrating, giving them an edge in overcoming the challenges that advanced technologies pose to people, employees, and consumers. Sixty-eight percent of Gen Xers rated themselves as highly effective in empathy, in comparison to 62 percent of Millennials.

AN EDGE IN LEADING WITH **EMPATHY**

68% Generation X
rated themselves as highly effective in empathy.
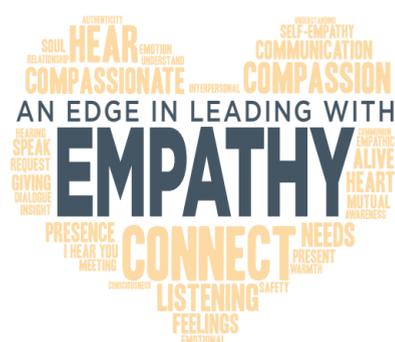
Less Likely to Advance Despite Being More Loyal

Gen X leaders had only 1.2 promotions in the past 5 years, significantly lower than Millennials (1.6 promotions) and Baby Boomers (1.4 promotions) during the same time. Even though their advancement rate is slower, most Gen X leaders remain loyal employees. Only 37 percent contemplate leaving to advance their careers—five percentage points lower than Millennials.

In addition, Gen Xers take after their older counterparts in longer tenure. Gen X and Boomers have, on average, worked for two companies over the past 10 years in comparison to Millennials who have worked at an average vof three organizations during the same time.

Only 1/3

Only 37% Generation X
contemplate leaving to advance their careers. Five percentage points lower than Millennials.
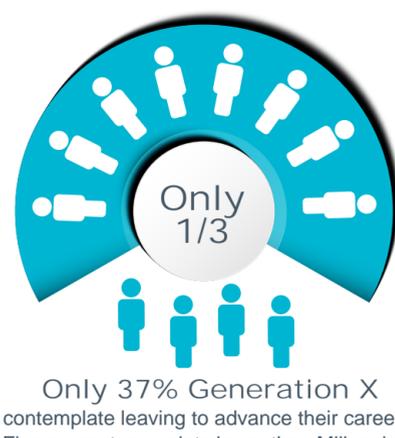
PROVEN ▶ 63 percent of Generation X not leaving—more loyal vs 58 percent of Millennials

As Eager to Lead as Millennials, and More Impatient

Although Millennials are often portrayed as too eager for leadership advancement, just as many Gen X leaders expressed a desire to be a leader before they were asked or had the opportunity. By comparison, only 74 percent of Baby Boomers said the same (7-in-10).

Despite the misconception that Millennials are the generation most interested in climbing the ladder, our latest Global Leadership Forecast revealed that it is actually Gen X leaders who are less satisfied with their rate of advancement. Only 58 percent of Gen Xers reported that they feel they are advancing within their organization at an acceptable rate, in comparison to 65 percent of Millennials.

8 of 10
From Both Younger Generations
expressed a desire to be a leader before they were asked or had the opportunity.

Driving Innovation with Collaboration

Gen X leaders' strength for working with others enables them to shape the future of work and generate faster innovation by getting people working together to solve customers' and their organization's issues. The large majority (69 percent) are effective in hyper-collaboration and working to break down organizational silos.

69% of Generation X
are effective in hyper-collaboration and working relentlessly to break down organizational silos.
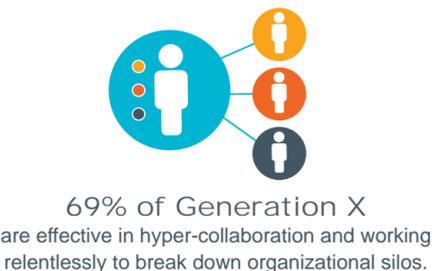
A Preference for Outside Learning

Although most Gen X leaders aren't looking outside for a new job, they are seeking more external development and coaching than any other generation. Leaders from this generation are much more likely than Millennials or Baby Boomers to prefer external coaching over internal coaching. Gen Xers also reported that they want more externally-developed than internally-developed material to support their development, an indication that organizations that can successfully integrate more external learning may be able to extend their capabilities into new areas and lines of business.

67% Generation X
would like more external coaching, compared to only 47 percent who said they want more coaching from their managers.
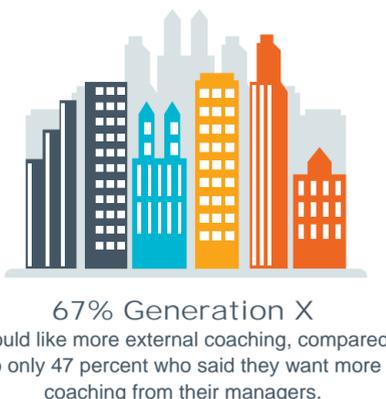
PROVEN ▶ 20 percent Gen X want more external coaching (than coaching from their own manager)

Bridging the Generational Gap

Gen X leaders are bridging the gap between the two, much larger generations surrounding them in the workplace. Here are the characteristics they have in common with their senior and junior counterparts:

GEN
MILLENNIALS GEN X | GEN X **BOOMERS**

In Common with Millennials and Gen X
> Digital savviness
> Eagerness to lead
> Driven by purpose

Unique to GEN X
> Strong desire for external mentoring and development
> Confident leading with Empathy

In Common with Boomers and Gen X
> Employer-loyal
> Virtual team leaders
> Execution-focused
> Identifying and Developing Talent

GEN X | GEN X

Personalization Rules

One consistent finding across leaders from all generations is that their most preferred mode of learning is through personalized activities, selected based on their role and development goals. Personalization is essential in a multi-generational workforce because even within each generation, individual skills and development needs will vary widely, so it's critical to identify what works for each individual's development. The best way to benefit all learners is not to focus on generational stereotypes, but to consider how learning can be personalized to meet individual development needs.