








Original research article

## NextGen 5.0 Leadership in Manufacturing: Tackling Workforce Challenges with a Multicountry and Multicompany Perspective

J. P. Salvadorinho<sup>a,b,c,\*</sup>  0000-0001-8424-9310, P. Hines<sup>d,e</sup>  0000-0003-1169-5912,  
M. Kumar<sup>f</sup>  0000-0002-2469-1382, C. Ferreira<sup>g,h</sup>  0000-0002-2799-643X,  
L. Teixeira<sup>g,h</sup>  0000-0002-7791-1932

<sup>a</sup> Science and Technology Department of Portucalense University, Porto, Portugal;

<sup>b</sup> REMIT – Research on Economics, Management and Information Technologies, Portucalense University, Porto, Portugal;

<sup>c</sup> IEETA (Institute of Electronics and Informatics Engineering of Aveiro), University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal;

<sup>d</sup> Lean Industry 4.0, workLAB, IDA Business Park;

<sup>e</sup> South East Technological University, Waterford, Ireland;

<sup>f</sup> Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, Wales;

<sup>g</sup> Department of Economics, Management, Industrial Engineering and Tourism (DEGEIT), University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal;

<sup>h</sup> Institute of Electronics and Informatics Engineering of Aveiro (IEETA), Intelligent Systems Associate Laboratory (LASI), University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal

### ABSTRACT

As Generation Z enters the job market, it is crucial for managers to understand how to foster their commitment, especially in the face of challenges like the Great Resignation and the Quiet Quitting. These challenges jeopardize organizational knowledge, innovation, and competitive advantage. In this way, this paper aims to identify the most effective leadership model for managing, engaging, and retaining Generation Z. The study adopts an abductive methodology, combining a systematic literature review on empirical studies about leadership styles that foster engagement with insights from a focus group of 13 manufacturing professionals across different countries. This article enhances the scientific literature with a leadership model tailored to the context of Industry 5.0, Generation Z and manufacturing organizations. Dubbed the NextGen 5.0 Leadership Model, it is built on three core pillars: a growth mindset, emotional intelligence, and a triple purpose.

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\*Corresponding author:

Juliana Pereira Salvadorinho

[juliana.salvadorinho@upt.pt](mailto:juliana.salvadorinho@upt.pt)

## 1. Introduction

Industry 5.0 (I5.0) emerged as a response to the principles of Industry 4.0 (I4.0), which prioritized

productivity at the expense of human involvement [1]–[3]. As the success of an organization relies on dedicated employees, employee motivation is crucial for achieving both personal and organizational goals [4]. Intellectual capital has become a key benchmark

for companies seeking to gain competitive advantages, particularly through human resource practices aimed at acquiring and developing skills and competencies [5]. This becomes even more pertinent for organizations as Generation Z (Gen Z) enters the workforce. Gen Z, considered to be born between 1995 and 2009 [6] or 2012 [7] is currently entering the labor market. It is known that generational changes and global developments influence the change and evolution of the concept of leadership [8]. Gen Z, specifically, places a high importance on intrinsic motivation [9] and dislikes being dictated to [10].

I5.0 encapsulate the environment of Gen Z, prompting cultural and operational adjustments through digital tools integration. Leaders serve as linchpins in digitalization success, discerning technological trends, devising strategies, and directing technology adoption within organizations [11]. With Gen Z's growing presence in the workforce, organizations must adapt to accommodate their distinct preferences, fostering a more dynamic and technologically advanced workplace.

This study seeks to identify the leadership style that best aligns with the characteristics of Gen Z in industrial organizations, providing an exploratory framework to initiate research on this emerging workforce. As Gen Z enters the workforce, it is imperative for managers to comprehend how to foster their engagement, mitigating the challenges posed by phenomena like the Great Resignation<sup>1</sup> [12] and Quiet Quitting<sup>2</sup>, which jeopardize organizational knowledge, innovation, and competitive advantage. Thus, the research question posited is: Amid the human resources challenges of I5.0, what is the most effective leadership style for engaging and retaining Gen Z in the modern workplace? An abductive methodology was employed, integrating deductive insights from a systematic literature review with inductive data collected from a focus group of six enterprise representatives and 13 professionals. This approach synthesized key characteristics of a leadership model tailored for Gen Z within I5.0.

The article comprises seven sections: the introduction, a theoretical background on workforce challenges, I5.0 leadership, and Gen Z motivators (Section 2), methodology (Section 3), results (Section 4), discussion (Section 5) and conclusions with limitations and future research suggestions (Section 6).

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Workforce key challenges in I4.0 and I5.0

I4.0 focuses on technological digitalization, leveraging advancements such as AI, data analysis, cloud computing, and mobile technologies [13]. In contrast, I5.0 emphasizes human-centric values, resilience, and sustainability [14]. Resilience emphasizes adaptive strategies for flexible manufacturing, sustainability promotes life-cycle approaches and interconnected industrial networks, while human-centricity values diverse perspectives and cross-disciplinary collaboration for inclusive manufacturing [15]. While these technological shifts revolutionize processes, they also bring significant workforce challenges. These include a lack of digital culture [16], the need for continuous upskilling and reskilling [17], changes in recruitment towards automation and data-driven strategies [17], and the critical task of retaining human capital amidst phenomena like the Great Resignation and Quiet Quitting [18], [19]. Additionally, managing multigenerational diversity requires inclusive approaches to engage Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z effectively [20].

Adapting people to such monumental changes in globalization and workplace dynamics requires leadership as the central driving force [11]. Leadership is uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between technological evolution and workforce readiness. Therefore, in the I5.0 era, leaders must demonstrate critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and coaching abilities to address these challenges while prioritizing human-centric approaches [11], [21]. In accordance with Goleman & Boyatzis [22] emotional intelligence integrates (see Table 1): self-awareness; self-management; social awareness; and relationship management.

### 2.2 Gen Z characteristics and motivational predictors

The integration of Gen Z into the workforce brings significant changes, as they value flexibility, instant feedback, inclusivity, and data-driven decision-making [23], [24]. Meaningful work, which fosters societal impact, personal growth, and intrinsic significance,

<sup>1</sup> The wave of employees resigning from companies which is having a global impact [12].

<sup>2</sup> Quiet quitting denotes fulfilling only the basic obligations of one's job without investing additional time, effort, or enthusiasm beyond the bare minimum. Despite the term suggesting departure, the employee remains in their role, drawing a salary while exhibiting minimal engagement [62].

**Table 1.** Emotional Intelligence model (Adapted from [22])

<b>Self-Awareness:</b> Recognize strengths, weaknesses, and emotions within us, as well as their influence	<b>Self-Management:</b> Handling emotions, particularly in stressful situations, while maintaining a positive outlook despite setbacks.	<b>Social Awareness:</b> Recognizing the emotions of others and understanding the dynamics within your organization	<b>Relationship management:</b> The capability to exert positive influence, provide coaching and mentorship, and skillfully resolve conflicts
	Emotional self-control		Influence
	Adaptability	Empathy	Coaching and Mentorship
Emotional Self-Awareness	Achievement Orientation		Conflict management
	Positive outlook	Organizational awareness	Teamwork
			Inspirational leadership

is a top priority for Gen Z [6], [9]. They emphasize happiness, family, sustainability, and freedom over job security, favoring honest communication, regular feedback, and coaching-based leadership styles [25], [26]. A positive, inclusive workplace with strong relationships is crucial, while non-monetary incentives, especially those tied to talent development, are more valued than traditional rewards [27]. Intrinsic motivation increasingly outweighs extrinsic rewards for this generation [28].

Leaders should transition from an old-fashioned leadership mindset to cultivate a growth mindset (GM), particularly in adapting to the complexities associated with Gen Z [29], [30]. By embracing a GM and acting as change agents, leaders can inspire employees, boosting commitment and improving organizational performance [31]. According to Betsy Ng [32] A GM involves believing intelligence can be developed through effort, while intrinsic motivation is the internal drive to engage in tasks for inherent satisfaction. Both are interconnected, with a GM fostering intrinsic motivation and the internalization of extrinsic rewards. This integrated view highlights the importance of cultivating these qualities in leadership to motivate and develop Gen Z. Apart from the GM, according to Gabrielova & Buchko [33], Gen Z favors leaders with robust and inclusive communication skills, high emotional intelligence<sup>3</sup>, a commitment to continuous mentorship, an engaged and committed personality, strong competence, and a dedication to promoting equality.

Focusing on Emotional Intelligence (EI) as a leader's trait, and according to the studies of Szczygieł [34] and van Dun & Kumar [35], EI has a positive impact on the improved regulation of positive emotions, and it is also associated with enhanced regulation of negative emotions, i.e., EI contributes to better handling of negative or stressful situations.

As outlined in Mukokoma [36]'s study, there exists a reciprocal relationship between emotional intelligence and employee motivation. In this way, having a GM and EI in leadership contribute to the creation of positive emotions and to increasing intrinsic motivation, which is a determining condition in fostering Gen Z's engagement.

### 3. Methodology

The study investigates the most suitable leadership style for managing Gen Z in the context of the Great Resignation, Quiet Quitting, and I5.0. It uses an abductive methodology, combining deductive and inductive approaches to derive insights. The deductive phase involved a systematic literature review (SLR) of empirical studies on leadership styles promoting engagement and commitment, focusing on the digital context of I4.0 and I5.0. Articles published since 2011 were selected because this year marks the inception of I4.0, highlighting its relevance to understanding leadership during the digital transformation era. The inclusion criteria required studies to focus on leadership styles fostering engagement, to be empirical in nature, and to center on manufacturing contexts. This process resulted in 27 selected articles (see Figure 1 with PRISMA method). The inductive phase was conducted through a focus group of 13 middle and senior managers from six companies in various industries and countries (Tables 2 and 3). Participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting middle and senior managers in manufacturing firms with direct supervisory experience of Gen Z employees. Participants addressed two core questions: a) What are the motivational factors influencing Gen Z, considering their professional experience? and b) Considering the discussed motivational factors, what attributes

<sup>3</sup> According to [22] (Table 1).

should a leader possess to effectively engage with Gen Z? The focus group discussions were transcribed and analyzed using thematic coding. Initial codes were inductively generated from the data and then grouped into higher-order categories (i.e., Growth Mindset, Emotional Intelligence, Purpose), consistent with the abductive approach. Two researchers independently coded the responses, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached, enhancing the credibility of the analysis. While the focus group offered rich insights, its size (13 participants) necessarily limits the generalizability of the findings. To mitigate this, the abductive approach emphasized combining qualitative data with systematic literature review evidence. By integrating the results of the SLR

and focus group, the study developed a framework highlighting the leadership attributes essential for engaging Gen Z.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Leadership Styles and Employee Engagement: Findings from Empirical Studies

The definition of leadership varies across numerous perspectives, one of which emphasizes the capacity to guide a group toward the achievement of objectives [37]. Leadership factors such as loyalty and professional respect play a crucial role in shaping

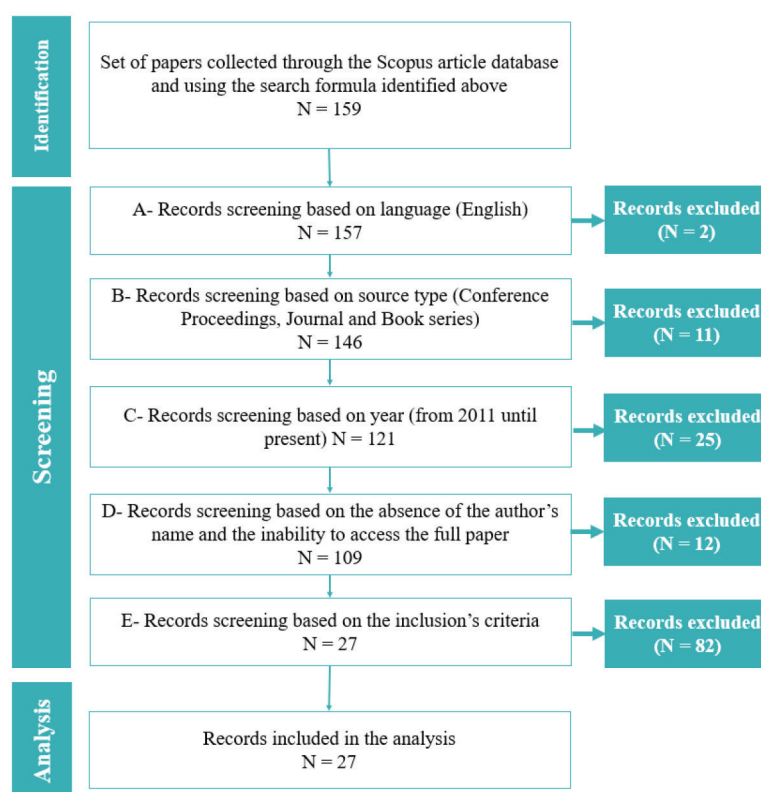


Figure 1. PRISMA method

Table 2. Companies summary

Company	No. of Employees	Headquarters	No. countries	Company years	Company Sector
Company A	16000	Switzerland	125	70	Trading of high technology components and provision of project application engineering
Company B	2400	United Kingdom	5	52	Instrumentation
Company C	200	United Kingdom	1	44	Pharmaceutical
Company D	40000	United Kingdom	2	50	Automotive research, development and engineering
Company E	3300	Finland	19	48	Labeling materials
Company F	5000	United Kingdom	3	120	Construction

**Table 3.** Focus group participants

Job title	Company
Application Consultant	Company A
Deputy Internal Sales Manager	Company A
Lean and Process Manager	Company A
Head of Quality Lean & IT	Company A
Senior Business Excellence Manager	Company B
Head of Production	Company C
Production Leader	Company D
Production Leader	Company D
Manufacturing Business Excellence Manager	Company D
Lean Engineer	Company D
Global Continuous Improvement Manager	Company E
Operations Manager	Company F
Group Operational Excellence Director	Company F

employees' job satisfaction, sense of fulfilment, and overall attitude toward the company [38].

#### 4.1.1 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership hinges on elevating followers' values, attitudes, and motives to a heightened level of enthusiasm and maturity, facilitating improved performance [39]–[42]. This transformative leadership model underscores the significance of intrinsic motivation and the growth of followers. In contrast, transactional leadership, for instance, places emphasis on social exchange [43], [44]. Leaders embodying transformational qualities exhibit adept visioning, rhetorical prowess, and effective impression management, leveraging these skills to forge robust emotional connections with their followers [39]. In the study by Bygstad et al. [39], it was found that transformational leadership tends towards coaching, goal setting, and values rather than a directive, control-oriented style. Besides that, Milhem, Muda, & Ahmed [45] studied 338 ICT sector employees in Palestine and found that leaders' emotional intelligence significantly enhances the connection between transformational leadership and employee engagement. The research by Ghadi et al. [46] supports the previous findings, indicating that training managers in transformational leadership and managing diverse working conditions among 530 full-time workers in Australia increases the significance of work and reduces demotivation. Additionally, Poddar [47] concluded that transformational and ethical leadership positively affect Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) performance, integrating it into organizational strategy and culture. On the other hand, Endriulaitienė & Morkevičiūtė [41]

revealed that transformational leadership can lead to workaholism due to heightened work motivation, despite its positive effects on motivation.

#### 4.1.2 Responsible Leadership

Responsible leadership integrates empathy, optimism, and a commitment to universal values, distinguishing itself from servant, ethical, and transformational leadership styles. Unlike the latter approaches that prioritize high profits and enhanced shareholder value, responsible leadership prioritizes positive social interactions to foster sustainable value. Its scope extends beyond financial considerations, impacting both internal and external stakeholders [48]. Responsible leadership is, therefore, recognized as an emerging concept situated at the intersection of studies on ethics, leadership, sustainability and corporate social responsibility [49].

#### 4.1.3 Servant Leadership

Servant leadership involves maintaining a balance between a humble service-oriented attitude and actions that foster efficacy [50]. Servant leadership is based on five key assumptions: humility and detachment, which prioritize others' interests; empowerment, which encourages autonomy and innovation; accountability, which guides based on individual contributions; and stewardship, which focuses on the common good and meaningful work. These principles foster a supportive, responsible, and purposeful leadership approach. Sousa & van Dierendonck's [50] findings indicate that the amalgamation of humility and proactive behaviors is especially powerful



in eliciting engagement at the highest hierarchical levels. This suggests that, overall, servant leadership may be particularly effective for executives and managers. In contrast, for managers operating at lower organizational levels, predominantly involved in operational aspects, the proactive aspect of servant leadership might suffice to generate engagement.

#### 4.1.4 Paternalistic Leadership

Liu et al. [51] identified three styles of paternalistic leadership: benevolent, moral, and authoritarian. Benevolent leadership enhances employee well-being and team performance by fostering a learning-oriented environment. Moral leadership, grounded in ethical values, earns respect by assigning appropriate tasks and providing autonomy. Authoritarian leadership, while dominant and controlling, may suppress subordinates' assertiveness and limit their perceived status. Liu et al. [51] examined paternalistic leadership in Taiwan and found it increased employee loyalty and responsibility. Although, in the engineering industry, authoritarian leadership is less suitable, while benevolent and moral styles are more accepted due to leaders' integrity and long-term supportive approach.

#### 4.1.5 More recently

Goleman [52] identified six leadership styles (Coercive, Authoritative, Affiliative, Democratic,

Pacesetter, and Coaching), revealing overlaps with existing styles. Coercive and pacesetter align with transactional leadership, while authoritative, democratic, coaching, and affiliative are associated with people-oriented leadership (Transformational, Servant, Responsible Paternalistic leadership styles). The most effective styles positively influence group climate and leverage emotional intelligence. Coercive and pacesetter leaders score lower in sympathy and support, whereas authoritative, democratic, coaching, and affiliative leaders contribute positively to the organization's climate. Drzewiecka & Roczniowska [53]'s study concluded that authoritative and coaching leadership styles mitigate employee stress by either minimizing organizational constraints or equipping subordinates to navigate workplace challenges. It is worth noting that Authoritative Leadership bears greater resemblance to Transformational Leadership, whereas Coaching is centered on developing individuals in accordance with their personal goals.

Additionally, mindfulness has the power to improve workplace social relationships, diminishing employee resistance and enhancing overall performance. Leaders practicing mindfulness positively influence their team members' well-being, fostering motivation and inspiration [54].

Table 4 summarizes the most prevalent characteristics of each leadership style. The essential factors for Gen Z leadership are also pointed out (according to the literature).

**Table 4.** Leadership styles summary (based on systematic literature review)

Characteristics	Leadership Style					Gen Z
	Transformational	Responsible	Servant	Paternalistic	Coaching	
Loyalty	x	x	x			x
Empathy and Kindness	x		x		x	x
CSR and sustainability		x				x
Humble service			x			x
Influential skills	x			x	x	x
Articulate vision	x					x
Autocracy				x		
Ethics and Integrity		x				x
Give autonomy			x			x
Collaborators' empowerment	x		x		x	x
Active listening					x	
Developing individuals	x				x	x
Focus:	Having a vision and motivating employees towards it	Vision and purpose aligned with internal and external stakeholders and the environment	Wellbeing of internal stakeholders	Influence over people	Develop people	

## 4.2 Gen Z Leader personality traits: an empirical analysis

In the focus group, the participants jointly created 17 groups of motivational predictors for Gen Z, which are shown and ranked in Table 5.

Although the focus group was limited to 13 participants, its multicountry and multicompany composition provides useful contrasts. For example, participants from larger multinational firms (Companies A, B, and E) emphasized flexible working and multicultural environments more strongly, reflecting their global operations. In contrast, representatives from smaller firms (Companies C and F) placed greater weight on recognition and career progression, highlighting the constraints of leaner organizational structures. Similarly, respondents based in the United Kingdom stressed monetary safety and progression, while those from continental Europe (Switzerland and Finland) more often prioritized sustainability and corporate social responsibility. These variations, though exploratory, indicate that Gen Z's expectations are not monolithic, but mediated by industry and national context.

After defining and grouping the motivational predictors, the participants identified the characteristics of leaders capable of engaging Gen Z. Instead of presenting raw flipchart images, these responses were thematically coded into categories for clarity.

The coded themes clustered around three overarching dimensions: Emotional Intelligence (EI), Growth Mindset (GM), and Purpose. Table 6 was thus created, where the following groups were found: EI (focusing on the meaning and components created by Goleman [22], [55]) and presented in Table 1; GM (considering the definitions in [32]); and Purpose. EI encompassed traits such as empathy, approachability, coaching, and trust-building. GM captured adaptability, openness, and flexibility in leading teams. Participants perceived purpose across three significant dimensions, extending beyond organizational goals to encompass individual and societal objectives, highlighting the importance of corporate social responsibility among organizations.

Following the presentation of the traits deemed significant by participants in a leader for Gen Z, it was imperative for the researchers to categorize them into core concepts.

After grouping the data, three key leadership categories emerged: EI, GM, and Purpose. EI is central to human-centered leadership, enabling leaders to build trust and motivation through empathy, strong communication, mental health support, and recognizing how their actions impact others. Leaders with emotional intelligence foster growth and engagement through feedback, coaching, and mentoring. A GM complements this by promoting adaptability, flexibility, and openness to change. Leaders with this mind-

**Table 5.** Gen Z Motivational Predictors (Focus group results- question a)

Predictors	Measures		
	Number of people who rated it as most important	Number of people who rated it as important	Number of people who rated it as least important
Work life balance	13	0	0
Multicultural environment	11	2	0
Flexible working	11	2	0
Social Exposure	11	2	0
Enjoy work	10	2	0
Having Purpose	10	3	0
Leadership Support	10	3	0
Corporate Social Responsibility	8	5	0
Tendency to change jobs	7	4	2
Recognition	6	7	0
Monetary Safety	5	6	2
Career Progression	5	6	2
Make a difference	3	9	1
Having fun in their lifestyles	3	10	0
Challenge	2	7	4
Digital enablers	2	8	3
Being good at work	2	7	4

**Table 6.** Leaders characteristics grouping result (question b)

Dimension	EI encompassed traits
Emotional Intelligence	Empathetic
	Personable (able to empathize with the employee's work and personal context)
	Approachable
	Positive
	Engaging/Passionate
	Communicative
	Supportive (mental health)
	He/she is aware of the shadow he/she cast
	Caring
	Leadership that gives opportunities to develop
	Open to feedback
	Trusting
Growth mindset	Coaching and mentoring skills
	Flexible with environment
	Patient
	Open-minded
	Change mindset
Purpose	Delegating
	Able to articulate vision (individuals vs company vs society/environment)
	Treat people as individuals (tailored)

set empower others, embrace new ideas, and foster resilience and innovation within their teams. Purpose unifies these elements by providing a compelling vision that aligns individual, organizational, and societal goals. Purposeful leaders connect with their teams on a deeper level by tailoring their approach to individuals' strengths, driving engagement and shared commitment to meaningful outcomes. Together, these traits create a leadership style that inspires and sustains organizational success.

## 5. Discussion

In the context of the systematic literature review focusing on empirical research in leadership within the realm of I5.0, five distinct styles have been examined: Transformational, Responsible, Servant, Paternalistic, and Coaching. The analysis reveals that the paternalistic style has roots in a specific cultural context (East) and includes authoritarian elements [51]. Compared to other leadership styles, the paternalistic style, which focuses on control and autocracy, does not align with the evolving needs of Gen Z, particularly in the Western world. In contrast, Transformational, Responsible, Servant, and Coaching leadership styles are more effective in fostering work

engagement. However, none of these styles fully address the unique demands of the new generation.

The NextGen 5.0 Leadership Style (Figure 2), tailored for Gen Z leadership, is built on three pivotal characteristics outlined in Table 6: Triple Purpose (encompassing individual, organizational, and societal dimensions), EI, and a GM. Focusing on purpose, the establishment of an individual purpose is capable of fostering the intrinsic motivation sought by Gen Z [6], [28]. According to literature, Gen Z also prioritize a balanced lifestyle and flexible work arrangements [56], alongside sustainability and corporate social responsibility (societal purpose) [25]. Aligned with this, this generation seeks support, coaching, growth opportunities, and challenges from its leadership, prioritizing intrinsic motivation over extrinsic rewards like monetary incentives [57]. This leadership must balance individual and societal purposes while prioritizing the organizational purpose, which is essential for the organization's survival. The Triple Purpose in NextGen 5.0 Leadership closely aligns with Industry 5.0's human-centric emphasis on diversity, collaboration, and inclusivity [58]. By fostering sustainability (another I5.0 pillar) through purpose-driven practices that benefit both organizations and communities, this approach resonates with Gen Z's intrinsic motivation for meaningful work and balanced lives [56].



A GM is established, where any setback is seen as a learning opportunity and evolution, and where emotions are intelligently managed, empathizing and collaborating with the external context. A Growth Mindset is vital for fostering sustainability and resilience in leadership and I5.0. By viewing setbacks as opportunities, it drives continuous improvement, adaptability, and long-term innovation [31], [32]. Leaders with a GM support evolving systems, personal development, and the ability to overcome challenges, aligning with the principles of sustainability and resilience in I5.0. On the other side, EI is essential for fostering resilience, a cornerstone of Industry 5.0 and effective leadership [15]. By managing emotions, empathizing, and supporting teams during change, leaders with high EI promote adaptability and emotional regulation. For Gen Z, who value emotional well-being, EI-driven leadership supports their growth, motivation, and sense of purpose [57]. In this way, Purpose is the core focus, with the leader leveraging two key resources—GM and EI—to fulfil the triple purpose.

According to Szczygiał & Mikolajczak [34], EI underscores the importance of acknowledging positive emotions and regulating negative ones, thereby reinforcing the GM, which perceives obstacles as part of the evolutionary process. Recognizing that everything evolves also enhances levels of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management, putting our setbacks into perspective. Purpose, meanwhile, serves as a catalyst for both the growth mindset and EI. It is recognized that purpose fulfils a fundamental human need [59] and is a natural and mentally healthy way to cope with stress [60],

[61], making it easier to overcome obstacles—a hallmark of the GM—when striving toward something that resonates with one's identity. Similarly, managing both positive and negative emotions becomes more manageable when aligned with one's purpose. Conversely, there exists a reciprocal influence, wherein the creation of a triple purpose event is fostered by resilience (a trait of the GM) and intelligent empathy (a broad form of EI).

NextGen 5.0 Leadership integrates transformational, servant, responsible, and coaching leadership styles to align with I5.0's core principles of resilience, sustainability, and human-centricity. This leadership model goes beyond synthesizing existing frameworks. While it draws inspiration from transformational, servant, responsible, and coaching leadership—as well as elements of Goleman's emotional intelligence-based styles—its novelty lies in explicitly integrating three underexplored constructs into a unified framework tailored for I5.0 and Gen Z: Growth Mindset, Emotional Intelligence, and a Triple Purpose orientation. Transformational leadership inspires Gen Z by linking personal and societal goals, while servant leadership fosters empathy and inclusivity. Responsible leadership ensures ethical, sustainable practices and builds resilience through trust and accountability. Coaching leadership supports growth and development, helping Gen Z embrace challenges as opportunities for learning and intrinsic motivation. Unlike these frameworks, which emphasize specific leadership dimensions in isolation, the NextGen 5.0 model foregrounds the interdependence of adaptability (through a Growth Mindset), emotional resilience (through Emotional Intelligence), and multilevel

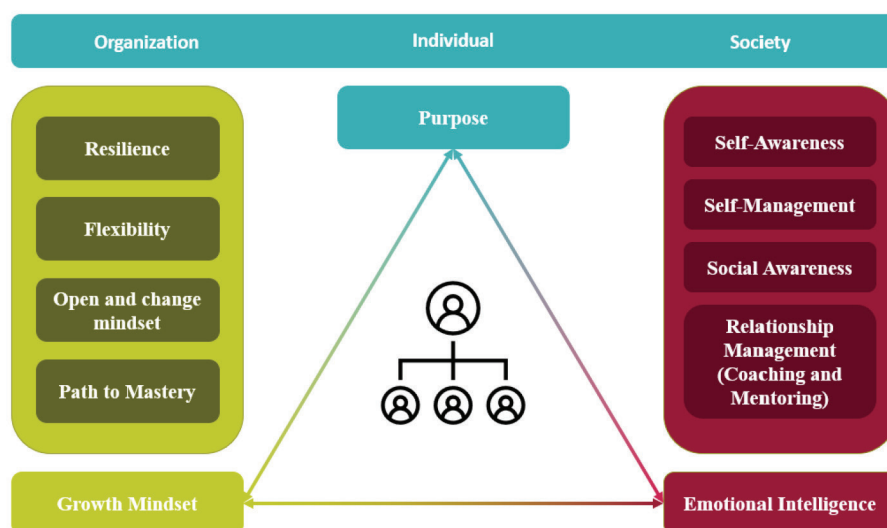


Figure 2. NextGen 5.0 Leadership model

alignment (through Triple Purpose across individual, organizational, and societal domains). In doing so, it demonstrates how leaders can simultaneously support personal growth, organizational performance, and societal impact. This positions the model as a distinct advancement beyond prior leadership frameworks, offering a purpose-driven, I5.0-specific approach to engaging and retaining Gen Z.

The multi-country and multi-industry nature of the focus group adds breadth to the findings, even if statistical generalization is not possible. By contrasting perspectives across sectors and national contexts, the study highlights that the NextGen 5.0 Leadership model holds broad relevance while also allowing for contextual nuance. For instance, CSR-driven leadership resonated most strongly in the continental European sample, whereas coaching and career progression dominated discussions in UK-based companies. This variation underlines the adaptability of the model to different industrial and cultural environments, strengthening its credibility despite the modest sample size.

## 6. Conclusion

The NextGen 5.0 Leadership Model integrates the core principles of I5.0—resilience, sustainability, and human-centricity—with established leadership styles, including transformational, servant, responsible, and coaching approaches. At the heart of the model is the Triple Purpose framework, which seeks to balance individual, organizational, and societal goals. This framework promotes a purpose-driven and inclusive leadership style, addressing the needs of employees, organizations, and society while fostering alignment with I5.0's emphasis on sustainability and human-centric values.

EI and a GM are highlighted as essential traits for leaders in the digital era. EI helps leaders build resilience, support employees, and navigate challenges, while a GM encourages continuous learning and adaptability, enabling organizations to thrive in dynamic environments. By integrating these principles, the model offers a comprehensive leadership approach that inspires trust, supports development, and addresses workforce challenges like the Great Resignation and Quiet Quitting, ultimately driving talent retention and organizational flexibility.

The model's practical implementation involves enhancing EI through training and mental health initiatives, embedding Triple Purpose into organizational practices, and fostering a GM by promoting learning

and adaptability. While the focus group sample was limited to 13 managers, its diversity across six companies, six industries, and three European countries enhances the robustness of the abductive approach. The contrasts observed across national and industrial contexts strengthen the model's credibility and provide avenues for refining it through larger-scale, cross-country studies. Future research will expand the model's validation to diverse generational and organizational contexts, ensuring broader applicability and effectiveness. Surveys could be developed to operationalize the three pillars (i.e., Growth Mindset, Emotional Intelligence, Triple Purpose) and tested through structural equation modeling to examine their predictive effects on Gen Z engagement and retention.

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