



# Leading Across Organisational Boundaries



# Overview



This report explores the perceived differences between generations on the skills required to be an effective global leader. Drawing on survey responses from two groups - **young professionals (YPs)** with one to three years of experience, and **senior leaders (SLs)** currently managing cross-border teams - it examines both the challenges and success factors of global leadership through generational lenses. The study aims to:

- ⇒ Equip YPs with clarity on the skills necessary to lead people across geographies and cultures,
- ⇒ Help SLs better understand the perspectives of YPs by highlighting where perceptions align and diverge, and
- ⇒ Provide HR managers with insights and recommendations to identify and develop YPs with global aspirations

The report is further broken down into three categories; **Purpose**, **Perception** and **Preparation**, based on the questions posed to respondents - to understand the motivations of individuals, their perception of effective global leadership and how to best prepare themselves to lead across organisational boundaries.



# Executive Summary



## ***Who we heard from***

106 respondents split evenly. SLs are more tenured (67% >20 years) and lead larger teams (27% >50 pax); YPs are clustered in smaller teams (60% <10 pax). Overseas willingness is high across both groups (73% SLs; 75% YPs).

## ***What success look like***

**Similarities:** Leading high-performing diverse teams and expanding into new markets.

**Divergence:** YPs value cross-border networks (66%); SLs emphasise sector recognition and depth in cross-border leadership skills.

## ***What gets in the way***

YPs feel the mechanics of distributed work: communication barriers (74%), lack of in-person interaction (60%), time zones (38%). SLs surface system-level frictions: trust (71%), communication (56%), in-person interaction (54%).

## ***Capabilities needed***

Both cohorts name (and lack) communication, adaptability and empathy. Self-awareness is flagged more as a shortfall (31% SLs; 34% YPs) than a stated need - a common blind spot.

## **Recommendations**

**YPs:** Pair skill-building (communication, adaptability, empathy) with external credibility (intentional sector networking); seek rotations/cross-border projects and mentoring to practise trust-building, bias navigation, and self-awareness under real constraints.

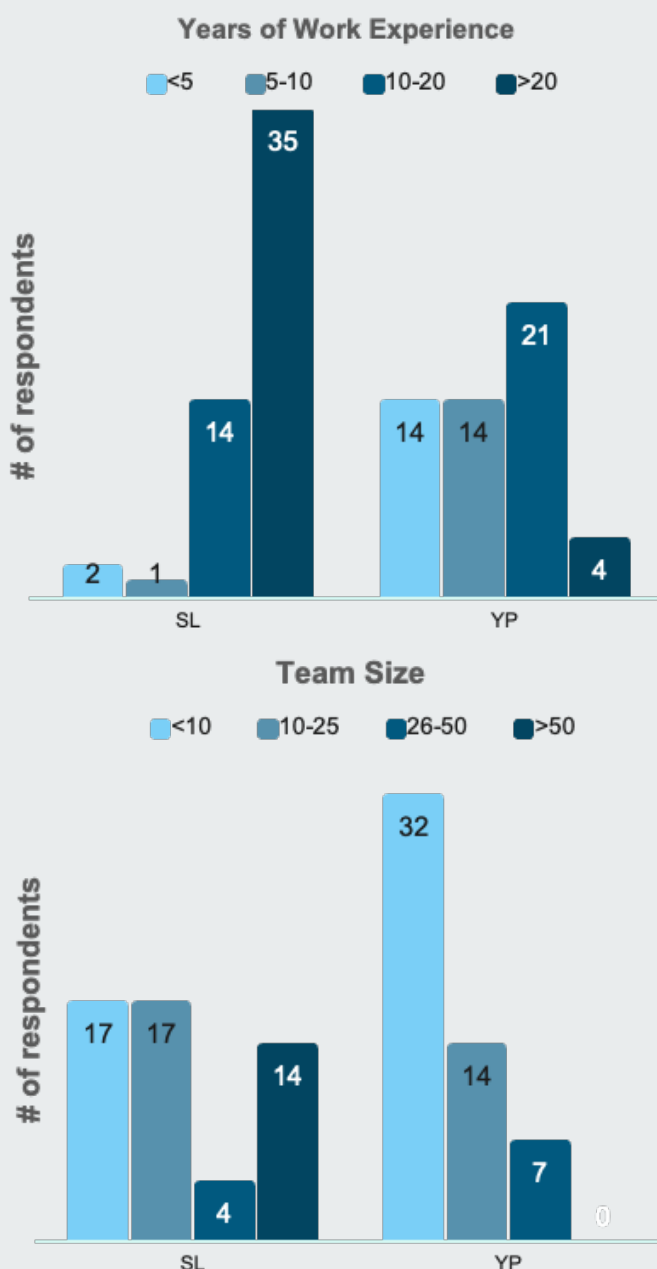
**SLs:** Model inclusive leadership, acknowledge YPs' practical frictions (time zones, virtuality), coach YPs on network + reputation, and offer near-term incentives while steering toward long-term mastery.

**HR:** Build early-career paths that blend cultural-agility training with short overseas stints and remote-first stretch roles; institutionalise local-leadership involvement, and global-local two-way communication; provide SLs refreshers on bias, self-awareness, and inclusive decision-making; scale cross-generational mentoring.

# Demographics

To enable meaningful comparison, **respondents were grouped into two categories based on their reported leadership experience**, allowing us to contrast the perceptions and demographics of both segments:

- ⇒ SLs included C-Suite / MD roles and Senior Manager / Director positions, reflecting individuals with substantial leadership responsibilities.
- ⇒ YPs included Manager / Associate Director, Junior Manager / Associate, reflecting the developmental stage of leadership responsibilities.



Among SLs, 67% reported more than 20 years of experience, with a further 27% having 10-20 years, underscoring their depth of professional exposure. In contrast, YPs were more evenly distributed; 40% had 10-20 years, 26% had 5-10 years, 26% had fewer than 5 years, and a small 8% exceeded 20 years. **This illustrates the more varied and transitional stage of professional maturity among YPs.**

**SLs frequently led larger groups**, with 27% managing more than 50 people and 33% overseeing teams of 10-25, while only 33% led teams smaller than 10. YPs, by comparison, were concentrated in smaller-scale management; 60% led teams of fewer than 10, 26% oversaw 10-25, and just 13% managed teams of 26-50.

Despite clear contrasts in experience and leadership responsibilities, **both groups shared a strong global ambition**. 73% of SLs expressed willingness to relocate internationally for a leadership opportunity, compared to 75% of YPs. This striking similarity suggests that despite differences in their current roles, both cohorts are united in their desire to embrace cross-border leadership experiences.

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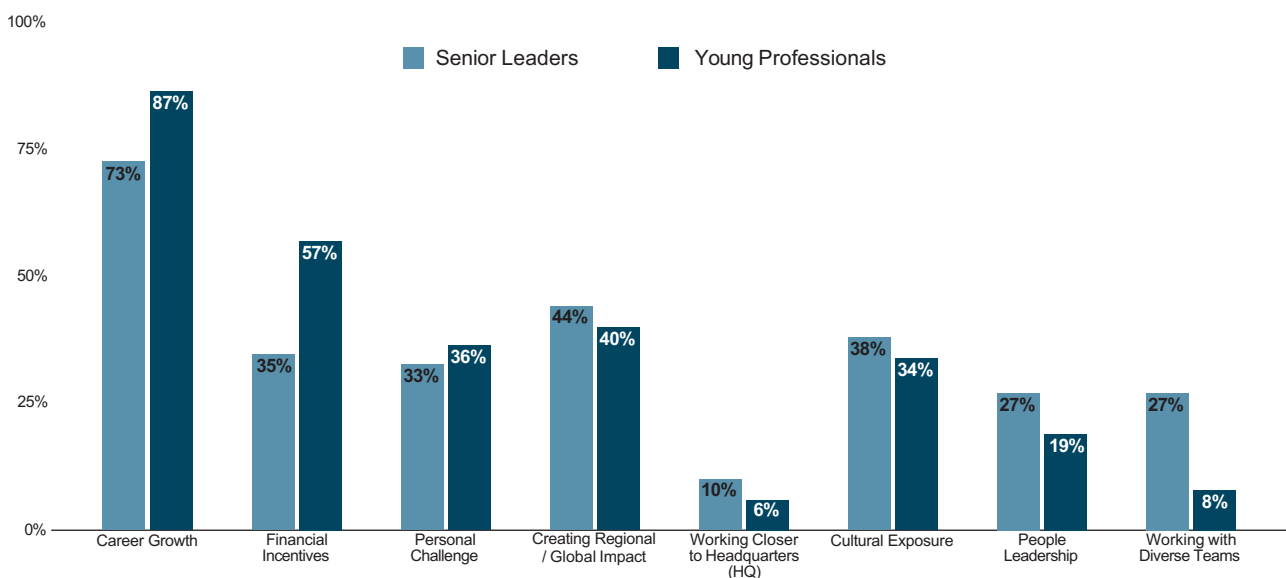
# Purpose

*“Many of us (YPs) change jobs not because we’re flaky, but because internal career growth and incentives are limited. We’re looking for meaningful opportunities, not just titles. We value learning, purpose, and fair recognition over hierarchy. Our approach to leadership may look different – more collaborative, digital-first, and values-driven.”*

# Purpose

To better understand the motivations that propel working professionals to take on global leadership roles, respondents were asked about **what inspires them** as well as **how they would define success** when taking on global assignments.

## What inspired you / will inspire you to pursue a global leadership role (based overseas / lead overseas teams while based in Singapore)?



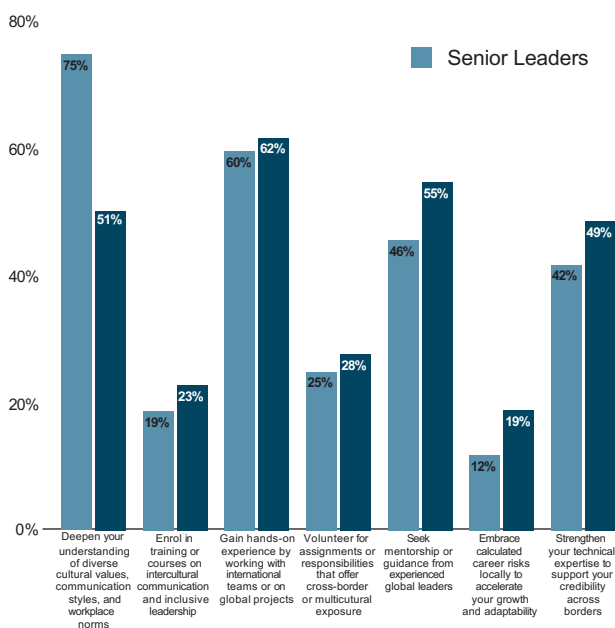
Both SLs and YPs (73% SLs; 87% YPs) deemed **career growth to be the key driving factor** that motivates them to take on global leadership assignments. Both cohorts were also relatively aligned in terms of viewing global roles as opportunities for personal growth, creation of global impact, as well as gaining of cultural exposure.

While 57% of YPs felt that financial incentives were critical to them, only 35% of SLs opted for that as a key determinant of what would inspire them to pursue global leadership roles. Other areas that saw divergence pertain to people leadership as well as the ability to work with diverse teams; both of which YPs placed lower emphasis.

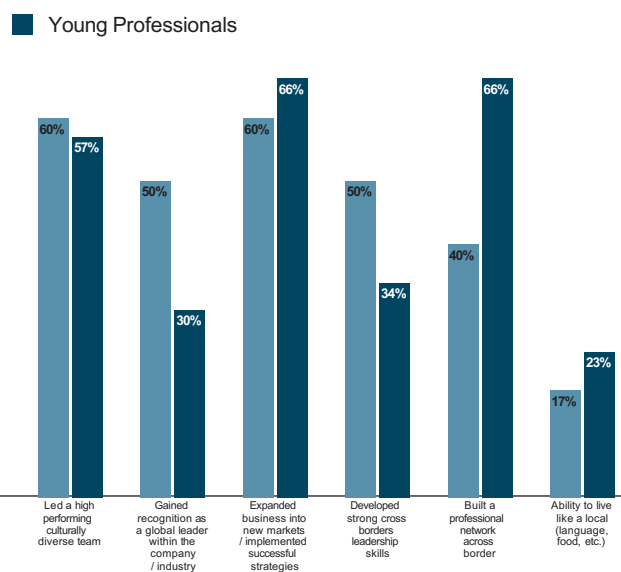
The above suggests that when global leadership opportunities arise, **SLs prioritise the prospect of accumulating critical experiences over immediate financial incentives** as these core skillsets would eventually value-add to their personal and career growth in the longer term, where compensation growth would likely follow.

# Purpose

What steps would you take to prepare yourself for a global leadership role?



How would you define personal and professional success after a global leadership assignment?



Both groups were aligned that **gaining hands-on experience in cross-border projects, seeking out mentors and strengthening technical expertise** are important steps to take in preparation for a global leadership role.

In contrast, most SLs believed in the **importance of deepening understanding of diverse cultural values, communication styles and workplace norms** (75% SLs; 51% YPs), indicating that this is fundamental to succeed in a global leadership role.

Both SLs and YPs were aligned on the **experience of leading high performing diverse teams**, and the **achievement of successfully expanding businesses into new markets**.

Their views differed on the **value of a professional cross border network** (40% SLs; 66% YPs), and the **importance of gaining recognition as a global leader** (50% SLs; 30% YPs), signalling that SLs seek to be known while YPs seek to know.

# Purpose



## Implications to YPs:

- ⇒ In line with recurring themes observed, YPs should be aware that SLs value 'external views' i.e. industry recognition, in addition to being introspective and focusing on honing own skillsets. Intentional networking within respective sectors could create a strong impression amongst SLs on readiness to take on global leadership roles.
- ⇒ YPs need to be cognisant of SLs' expectations with regards to the need to deepen understanding of various aspects of cultural diversity and convey that they have the necessary awareness of the same.
- ⇒ Based on SLs' views of what it takes to be successful global leaders, YPs should also aim to acquire knowledge of cultural nuances as well as seize opportunities to work with diverse teams and apply theoretical learnings in addition to simply putting up their hands to request for overseas assignments.

## Implications to SLs:

- ⇒ While it may not matter that much in the long run, there is a need to ensure YPs see some form of financial benefit in the interim period should SLs wish to attract young talent to relocate abroad or groom for eventual global leadership roles.
- ⇒ It is likely that YPs would seek mentorship in SLs given that they believe it helps prepare them to become global leaders. It is thus SLs' responsibilities to remind YPs that the journey to get there and intentional accumulation of critical skillsets are as important as technical subject matter expertise and commercial track records, in addition to working abroad.

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# Perception

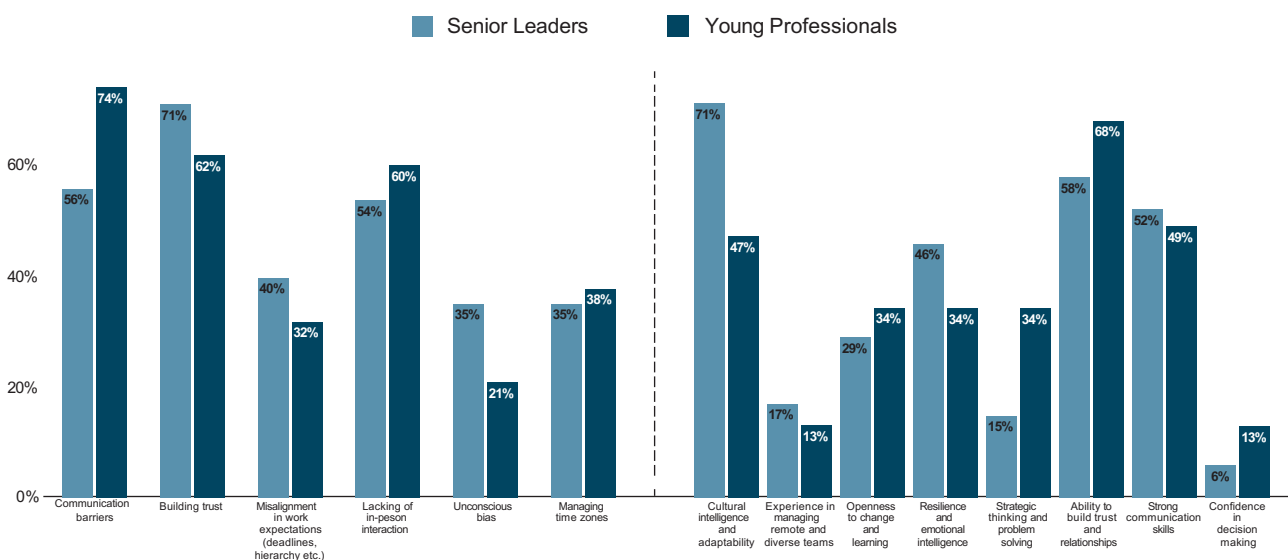
*“One of the most common misconceptions senior leaders may have is that young professionals are impatient and unwilling to pay their dues. In truth, many are deeply committed to impact and are simply questioning why certain legacy systems exist, and whether they still serve the mission.”*

# Perception

To explore perceptions of effective global leadership, respondents were asked about key **challenges** and **success factors** in leading cross-border teams.

In your opinion, what are the challenges when leading cross-border or culturally diverse teams?

What sets leaders apart between those who thrive in global roles and those who struggle?



When asked about challenges, YPs remained most concerned with the practicalities of cross-border work. The majority pointed to **communication barriers** (74%), **building trust** (62%), and **lack of in-person interaction** (60%) as persistent frustrations. SLs, while sharing similar concerns, also surfaced issues less visible to YPs e.g. unconscious bias was identified by 35% of SLs (vs 21% YPs).

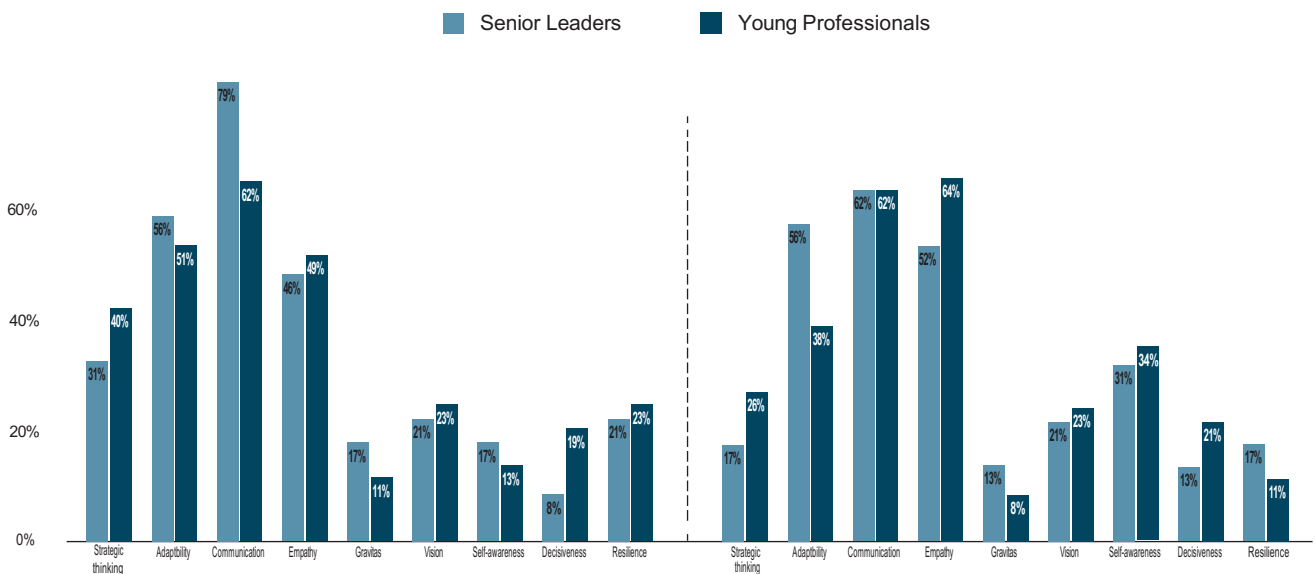
This divide was also reflected in views on what distinguishes successful global leaders. Both groups agreed on the centrality of **trust-building and cultural intelligence**, yet their secondary priorities diverge. **YPs emphasised communication skills** (49%) and **strategic problem-solving** (34%), while **SLs gave more weight to resilience and emotional intelligence** (46%), along with their accumulated experience in navigating complex environments.

Together, the findings suggest that YPs focus on the **mechanics of cross-border collaboration**, while SLs, shaped by years of observing cultural missteps and systemic challenges, **place greater emphasis on resilience, adaptability, and overcoming deeper biases**.

# Perception

What are the critical leadership attributes that leaders need to lead global teams?

What are the critical leadership attributes that leaders lack when leading global teams?



When asked about the attributes most critical for leading global teams, both groups converged on similar themes. **Communication** (79% SLs; 62% YPs) was the top priority, followed closely by **adaptability** (56% SLs; 51% YPs) and **empathy** (46% SLs; 49% YPs).

When the same attributes were framed in terms of what leaders lack, a mirror image emerged. SLs most often pointed to gaps in **communication** (62%), **adaptability** (56%), and **empathy** (52%), while YPs emphasised the absence of **empathy** (64%), **communication** (62%), and **adaptability** (38%). Both groups thus identified the same qualities as most needed and most lacking, suggesting these skills are widely valued yet underdeveloped in practice.

There was also a notable divergence: **self-awareness was named far more as a shortfall** (31% SLs; 34% YPs) **than as a critical need** (17% SLs; 13% SLs). This indicates that while leaders do not always list self-awareness among the top attributes upfront, its absence becomes apparent when reflecting on weaknesses.

Overall, the findings highlight a **shared recognition that communication, adaptability, and empathy are indispensable**, but also the areas where leaders most often fall short - underscoring **the challenge of sustaining these qualities under global pressures**.

# Perception



## Implications to YPs:

- ⇒ Early-career programmes should focus on strengthening communication, adaptability, and empathy as core skills, since these are both the most valued and most often lacking in practice.
- ⇒ YPs could benefit from coaching on resilience and self-awareness, which SLs see as critical differentiators but which YPs tend to undervalue until weaknesses emerge.
- ⇒ Structured opportunities such as rotational roles or diverse team assignments would allow YPs to practise balancing everyday cross-border challenges (time zones, virtual collaboration) with the deeper demands of building trust and navigating bias.

## Implications to SLs:

- ⇒ For SLs, the emphasis should be on sustaining communication, adaptability, and empathy under global pressures, not just recognising them as important.
- ⇒ Since YPs often flag practical frictions like time-zones and remote interaction, SLs can use these moments to model coping strategies and validate them as genuine developmental needs rather than complaints. SLs should also consciously demonstrate self-awareness and inclusive leadership, given that YPs see these as gaps in senior role models.
- ⇒ Recognising that YPs place high value on networking, SLs can mentor them on building durable cross-border professional networks while balancing this with sector recognition and credibility.

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# Preparation

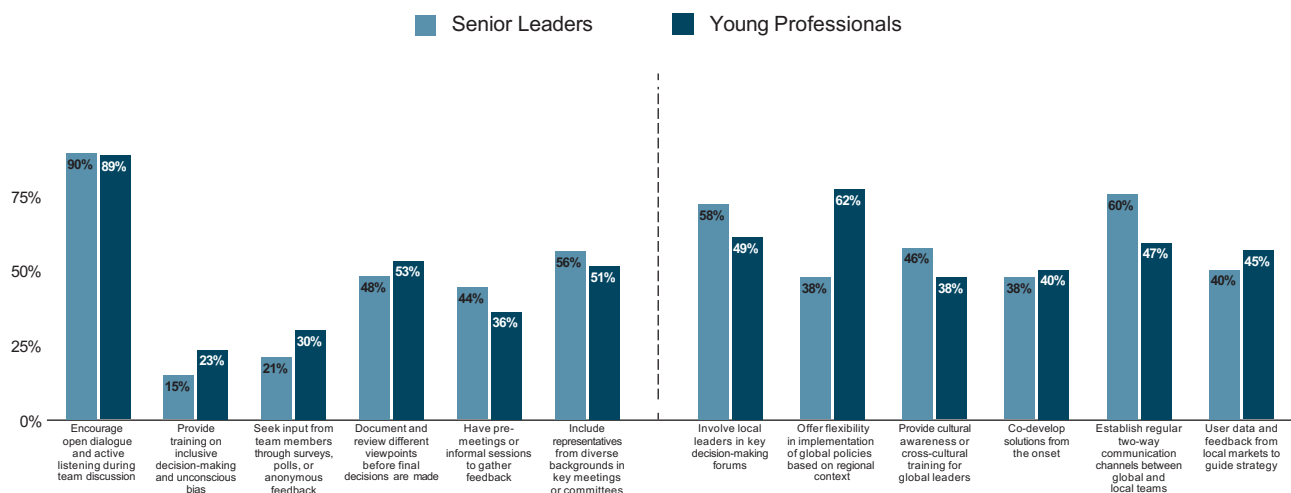
*“To succeed as global leaders, cultural agility and empathy are essential skills to have. Being able to lead across cultures starts with the ability to listen deeply, adapt quickly, and build trust beyond borders.”*

# Preparation

To explore preparation of effective global leadership, respondents were asked about the best actions required to best prepare effective global leaders based on several approaches / attributes that have been identified to be essential for effective global leadership.

**How would you ensure diverse perspectives are acknowledged and integrated into decision-making processes?**

**How would you ensure local cultural expectations and business practices are considered in the decision-making processes?**



SLs and YPs were aligned on how to integrate diverse perspectives, with both groups favouring **open dialogue and active listening** (90% SLs; 89% YPs) as the most effective method. **Training on inclusive decision-making** (15% SLs; 23% YPs) was seen as least impactful by both groups.

**Including diverse representation** (56% SLs; 51% YPs) and **having pre-meetings** (44% SLs, 36% YPs) were two methods that SLs prefer more than YPs, signalling the need for YPs to consider taking such initiatives.

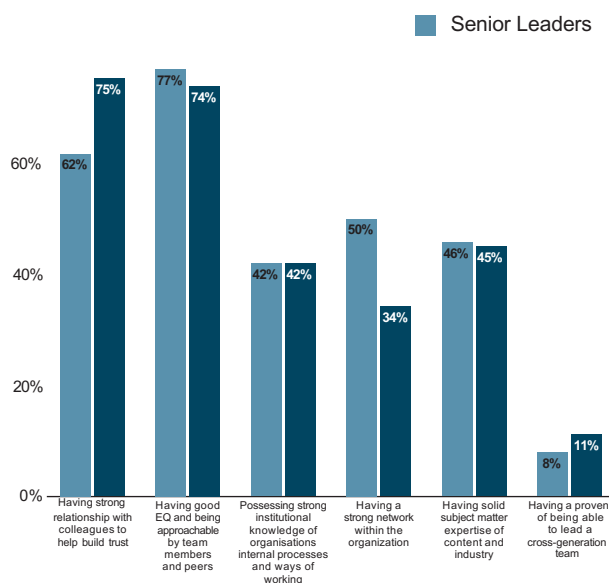
SLs and YPs generally held contrasting views on how best to integrate local cultural expectations into decision-making processes.

Notable areas of divergence included: **Offering flexibility in applying global policies regionally** (38% SLs; 62% YPs), **Regular two-way communication between teams** (60% SLs; 47% YPs), and **Cultural awareness training** (46% SLs; 38% YPs).

YPs may need to **augment their perspectives of what works**, since SLs' views would likely be based on real experiences and proven track records.

# Preparation

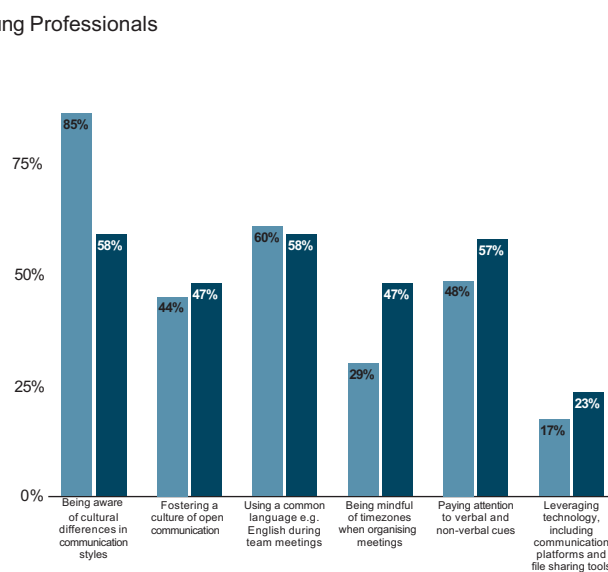
What attributes are required to influence effectively without authority?



YPs and SLs had similar views on attributes required to influence effectively without authority, especially on the need to have **good EQ and approachability** (77% SLs; 74% YPs) and **strong relationships with colleagues** (62% SLs; 75% YPs).

This suggests that **having good EQ and strong relationships are more effective** than **having a proven track record or subject matter expertise**. This is further supported by the need to have a strong network within the organisation by SLs (50%).

What attributes are required for global teams to communicate effectively?

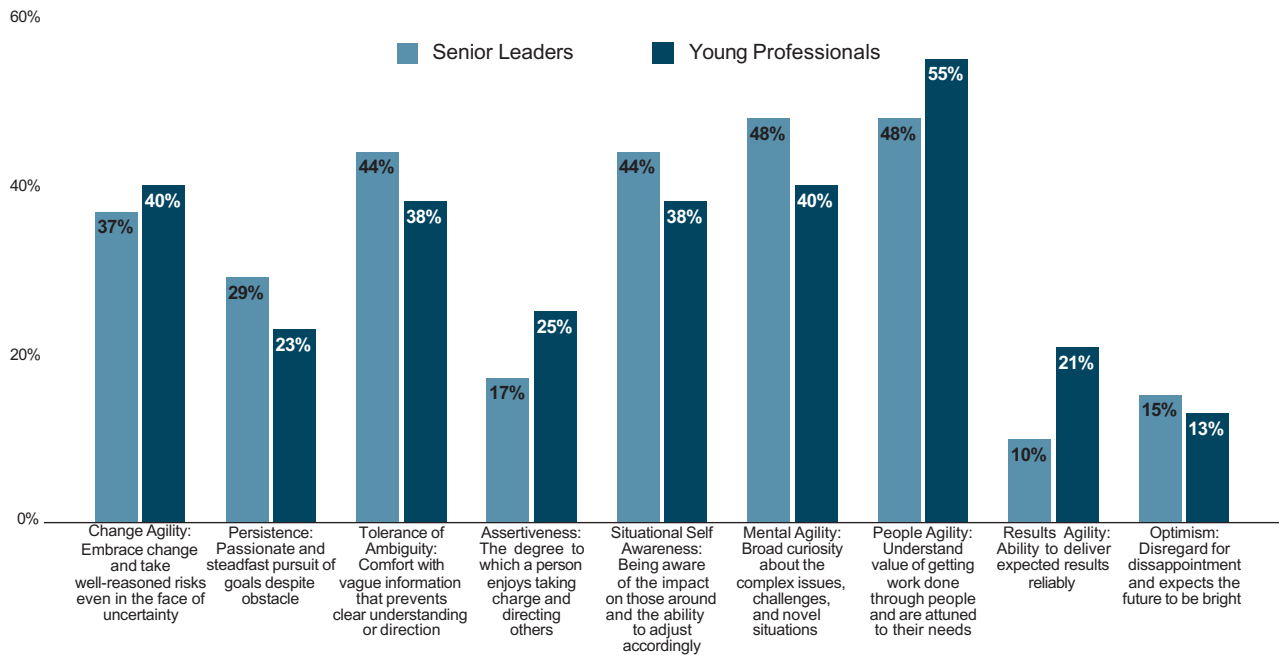


**Awareness of cultural differences in communication styles** (85% SLs; 58% YPs), **using a common language** (60% SLs; 58% YPs), and **paying attention to verbal and non-verbal cues** (48% SLs; 57% YPs) saw highest alignment. However, differing % values mean that YPs are generally on the right track but may need to reprioritise should they wish to learn from SLs' successes.

Divergent views were seen on **being mindful of time zones** (29% SLs; 47% YPs), likely due to the mindset shift of *being accommodating when and being accommodated to*; with increasing levels of seniority.

# Preparation

## Which traits signal high potential to be a global leader?



Both SLs and YPs seem generally aligned on this topic.

Both groups saw **people agility** (48% SLs; 55% YPs) and **mental agility** (48% SLs; 40% YPs) as the most important traits.

**Mental agility** (48% SLs; 40% YPs), **tolerance of ambiguity** (44% SLs; 38% YPs), and **situational self awareness** (44% SLs; 38% YPs) are traits that YPs may want to place more emphasis on as such traits were ranked higher in importance by SLs.

On the other end of the spectrum, **results agility** (10% SLs; 21% YPs) was valued significantly less by SLs than YPs, signalling that YPs need not focus as much on that trait if they want to stand out as a candidate for a global leadership role.

Overall, SLs seem to prioritise **traits that showcase situational awareness and adaptability rather than individual performance**.

# Preparation



## Implications to YPs:

- ⇒ **Awareness:** YPs should strive to go through cultural training or increase their exposure to the country which they would be working with to be aware of cultural differences in communication styles. YPs could request for opportunities to work on cross-border projects in a smaller capacity or even visit the country to broaden their own horizon.
- ⇒ **Adaptability:** SLs stated people agility, mental agility, situation self awareness as the top three traits for a potential global leader to have, signalling that adaptability to different situations is a crucial skill for YPs to develop.
- ⇒ **Active Listening:** YPs need to be conscious that ensuring clear and regular two-way communication channels between global and local teams is critical to ensure local cultural expectations and business practices are considered in the decision-making processes.
- ⇒ **Advice:** YPs can benefit from having a mentor within the company. Given that YPs lack authority and SLs view having a strong relationship within the organisation as a key attribute to effectively influencing without authority, YPs should leverage mentorship programs if available, keeping an eye out for leaders within their company with similar values and for opportunities to work with them.

## Implications to SLs:

- ⇒ While SLs have more experience working across borders, one cannot deny that the YPs from other countries might not have the same values or goals as their predecessors. For example, the social movement of *lying flat* or “*tang ping*”, where young people do the bare minimum to get by as a form of passive resistance to the pressure to constantly strive for success and societal expectations, is abhorrent and unfathomable to the older generations.
- ⇒ What worked for SLs in the past might not work for YPs; mentorships with dialogue would be far more fruitful than a mentorship of preaching.

# Conclusion



YPs need to balance **skill-building with external credibility**, strengthening communication, adaptability, and empathy while also seeking cross-border exposure and sector networking. Mentorship and rotational assignments can help YPs build resilience, cultural awareness, and influence without authority.

SLs, meanwhile, should focus on modelling inclusive leadership, validating YPs' day-to-day challenges, and adapting mentorship to dialogue rather than preaching. To sustain engagement, SLs must also offer near-term incentives while guiding YPs toward long-term global readiness.

## HR's role

**For YPs:** Create structured programmes that combine cultural agility training, short-term overseas rotations, and opportunities to lead cross-border projects. HR can also establish mentorship schemes that pair YPs with senior leaders, helping them build both skills and sector credibility.

**For SLs:** Provide leadership refreshers on inclusive decision-making, resilience, and self-awareness. HR can facilitate mentoring frameworks that encourage dialogue across generations and offer tools to help SLs better understand evolving values and motivations of younger talent.



# Thank you.

