

How Intergenerational Leadership Unlocks Innovation and Sustainability in Business

May 2025



United Nations
Youth Office



ST.GALLEN
SYMPOSIUM



Lead Authors

Felix Rüdiger, Head Content & Research, St. Gallen Symposium

Kaspar Köchli, Research Manager, St. Gallen Symposium

Matthew Hunter, Partnerships Lead, United Nations Youth Office

Nolita Thina Mvunelo, Programme Manager, The Club of Rome

Acknowledgements:

We want to thank the experts who generously donated time and shared their learnings as interview partners; we are grateful to Sweta Chakraborty, Jason Jay, Dr. David Ong, Dr. Julia M. Puaschunder, Rebecca Robins and Angela Sun. Important ideas inspiring this report were co-developed in joint publications between the St. Gallen Symposium and Boston Consulting Group, co-authored with Arthur Boulenger, Adam Job, Daniel Kessler, Martin Reeves and Can Schnigula, and in a joint publication with André Hoffmann of InTent. We also want to thank Carlos Alvarez Pereira, Christopher Coupland, Gunnar Hauptmann, Frauke Kops, Felipe Paullier, Lindsey Prowse, Mamphela Ramphela, Supriya Singh and Beat Ulrich for their valuable feedback on this report.

This publication emerged from research conducted in the context of the joint initiative of The Club of Rome and the St. Gallen Symposium for “A New Generational Contract”. It is also part of a part of a broader initiative – The Fifth Element, a program of The Club of Rome.

This is an independent report commissioned by the St. Gallen Symposium, The Club of Rome and the United Nations Youth Office. The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the United Nations.

Contents

→	Foreword	02
→	Executive Summary	03
→	The Intergenerational Leadership Gap	05
→	How Intergenerational Leadership Drives Success	08
→	Making Intergenerational Leadership Work: Three Approaches	11
→	Taking Action: How to Move Forward Tomorrow	17
→	References	20



Foreword

The world today faces unprecedented challenges – from the climate crisis and economic instability to social inequality and rapid technological shifts. Addressing these complex issues requires fresh perspectives and innovative solutions. Despite making up nearly half of the global population, **younger generations remain largely excluded from decision-making spaces**. As a result, we are depriving ourselves of the ingenuity, energy and problem-solving capabilities of these generations.

Intergenerational leadership, in which individuals of all ages are engaged as equal partners in decision-making, is not just a matter of fairness; it is a **strategic imperative**, both for the United Nations and for business. By mainstreaming intergenerational leadership, we can create forward-thinking institutions that are responsive to complex challenges and ensure long-term sustainability. As drivers of innovation and economic growth, businesses have a crucial role to play in leading this transformation. They can test, refine and champion new models of intergenerational leadership.

Here, the United Nations Youth Office, the St. Gallen Symposium and The Club of Rome gather research and learnings from the pioneering work of organizations that have

adopted intergenerational leadership models. We present actionable recommendations for businesses who want to **build new sources of competitive advantage and stronger, more resilient organizations** prepared to navigate the complexities of the twenty-first century and contribute to a more just, sustainable and prosperous future for all.



Felipe Paullier

Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs, United Nations



Mamphela Ramphele

Honorary President, The Club of Rome



Peter Voser

Chair, St. Gallen Symposium

Executive Summary

Around the world, there is a widening generational gap in business leadership: While the median age of the global workforce is 39.6, the global average age of CEO stands at 56.8. The average age of board members across major markets such as Brazil, the United States of America, the European Union, South Africa and India ranges from 58 to 64 years old. This report demonstrates the immense potential of shifting towards **intergenerational leadership models in business**. Based on an extensive review of the scientific literature and learnings from pioneering efforts, we show that meaningfully involving the next generation in decision-making can help businesses **achieve a competitive advantage and positively impact both people and the planet**.

Greater diversity in perspectives – at the board and executive levels as well as across the organization – can unlock untapped potential.

Intergenerational leadership catalyzes the following **five positive decision-making dynamics**:

- Fostering empathy with **employees and customers**
- Strategizing on **longer-term timescales**
- Overcoming the “**success trap**”
- Introducing **creative friction** in problem-solving
- Strengthening **commitment** and internal checks and balances

In combination, these mechanisms can positively impact

- **the planet**, by fostering regenerative value creation
- **people**, by cultivating an inclusive culture and social responsibility
- **profit**, by promoting innovation

Intergenerational Leadership

Intergenerational leadership refers to the meaningful involvement of multiple generations in decision-making across all spheres of operation. Diversifying the ages of decision-makers has increasingly been recognized to drive transformational change. For example, in 2023, the United Nations Secretary-General made this case in his policy brief “**Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision-making Processes**”.¹

Intergenerational leadership can yield tangible benefits for businesses and create value for people and the planet. It is also widely seen as an enabler to facilitate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Yet currently, this potential remains largely untapped.

In business, intergenerational leadership can add value at:

- the executive (C-suite) level
- the corporate board (board of directors/supervisory board) level
- middle management and project leadership level

Making intergenerational leadership work: Three approaches

Embedding Intergenerational Leadership Across the Organization

Enabling Co-Leadership and Shared Decision-Making

Fostering Consultation and Mutual Learning



The case for intergenerational leadership is increasingly clear. Yet, how to implement it is a more open question. In this report, we explore pioneering efforts to integrate intergenerational leadership and offer key insights about what works.

We suggest three main approaches to enabling intergenerational decision-making:

- **Consultation:** These methods, which include reverse mentoring and next-generation advisory boards, focus on learning from younger generations.

- **Co-leadership and shared decision-making:**

This approach directly involves members of different generations in core decision-making structures.

- **Embedding intergenerational leadership:**

This effort mainstreams intergenerational leadership in the culture of an organization.

These three approaches strategy, structure and culture should be considered as a continuum. Organizations will deploy different approaches depending on their particular context. In the last section, we offer five tangible steps executives can take to unlock value for people, planet and profit through intergenerational leadership.

The Intergenerational Leadership Gap

Across decision-making structures in most sectors, younger generations are largely absent. This holds true, first, in the political arena. A 2023 report² revealed that a mere 2.8% of the world's parliamentarians are aged 30 or under, and only 18.8% are aged 40 or under. This imbalance is even more pronounced in Africa, the world's

most youthful continent, where the population's median age is 19.7 yet the median age of political leaders is 62.³ Such a vast disparity raises questions about the ability of current leadership to effectively represent and address the concerns of younger generations.

There is a big gap between the demographics of private sector leadership, employees, customers, and youth



70%

Global population under 50



39.6

Median age of global workforce



5%

S&P 500 board directors under 50



56.8

Global average age of CEOs

Sources: United Nations (2024); Alliance Bernstein (2024); Statista (2024); Heidrick & Struggles (2023)

The gap has been widening in recent years (2014-2023)



51.8 ↗ **55.1**

CEO average hiring age



47.5 ↗ **50.8**

CFO average hiring age

YET

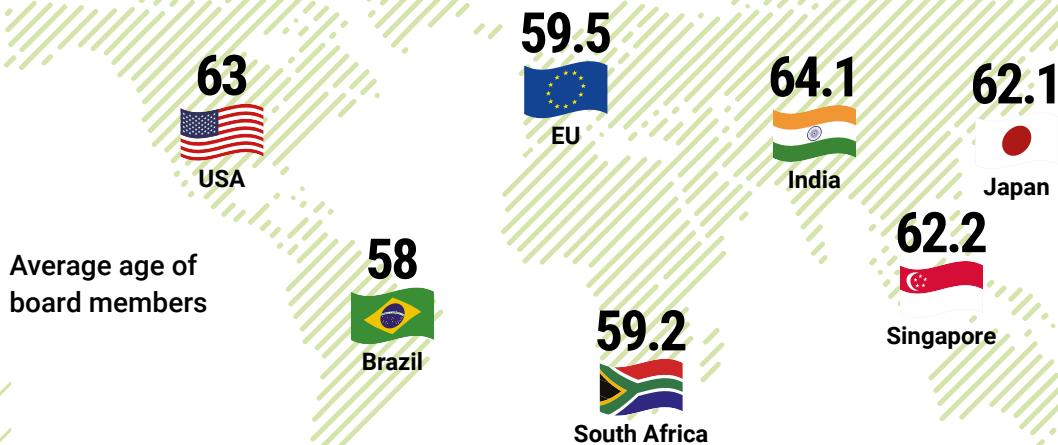


42 ↘ **41.6**

Workforce median age

Sources: Data for the USA, from Fortune 500 and S&P 500 companies in Crist | Kolder (2024); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024)

The intergenerational leadership gap is a global issue



Sources: Spencer Stuart (2024); BoardEx (2025); Tsutsumi (2025); Spencer Stuart (2022); Spencer Stuart (2023); Kapoor and Jain (2025).

The business world mirrors this generational gap.

Over the past decade, the average hiring age of CEOs at Fortune 500 and S&P 500 companies has risen from 51.8 to 55.1 years old,⁴ while the average age of standing CEOs has increased from 54 in 2008 to over 58 in 2023.⁵ In 2023, the average age of independent S&P 500 board members reached 63.⁶ In the United States of America, only 5% of directors on S&P 500 boards are under 50,⁷ while 65% of the domestic – and 70% of the global – population is under 50.⁸

The **trend of aging leadership** – which is proceeding faster than general demographic trends in many countries – is not limited to the Western hemisphere. The global average age of CEOs is 56.8 years old⁹ while the median age of the global workforce is 39.6 years old.¹⁰ This phenomenon is further evident in Asia, Africa and Latin America. However, it is important to note that norms around and perceptions of authority, hierarchy and collaboration differ according to context.

- **In Europe**, an analysis of around 5,900 companies revealed an average board member age of 59.5.¹¹
- **In Singapore**, the average age stood at 62.2 years as of 2022; 79% of directors were 56 years old or older.¹²
- **In Japan**, the average age as of 2025 was 62.1, marking a continuous rise for 33 consecutive years.¹³
- **In Brazil**, the average age in 2017 was 55 years;¹⁴ as of 2024, it stood at 58.¹⁵
- **In South Africa**, the average age in 2023 of non-executive board directors was 59.2.¹⁶
- The average age of independent board directors in **India's** top 200 companies was 64.1 years old in 2024.¹⁷

Notably, the global movement to involve more women on boards appear to help counter this trend: The global average age of women board members is lower than that of men (57.2 compared

to 60.3 in 2021), and the average age of female board chairs decreased from 59.4 years in 2018 to 57.7 years in 2021.¹⁸ Thus, intersectional diversity in decision-making processes is important.

Today's senior executives may be more open to intergenerational leadership than we think

Does intergenerational collaboration enhance leadership effectiveness?

83% Leaders of Tomorrow

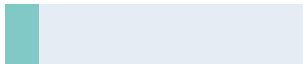


92% Senior Executives

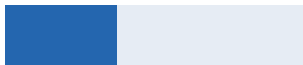


Is intergenerational leadership widespread in today's business world?

11% Leaders of Tomorrow

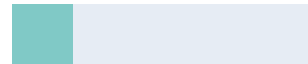


37% Senior Executives



Are senior executives receptive to intergenerational decision-making?

20% Leaders of Tomorrow



51% Senior Executives



Question 1: percent responding "More Effective" or "Slightly More Effective"; **Question 2:** percent responding "Very Widespread" or "Common"; **Question 3:** percent responding "Extremely Receptive" or "Somewhat Receptive"

Sources: Buder, F., Rüdiger, F., Dietrich, H. (2025). Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow: Navigating global power shifts. Nuremberg Institute for Market Decisions & St. Gallen Symposium.

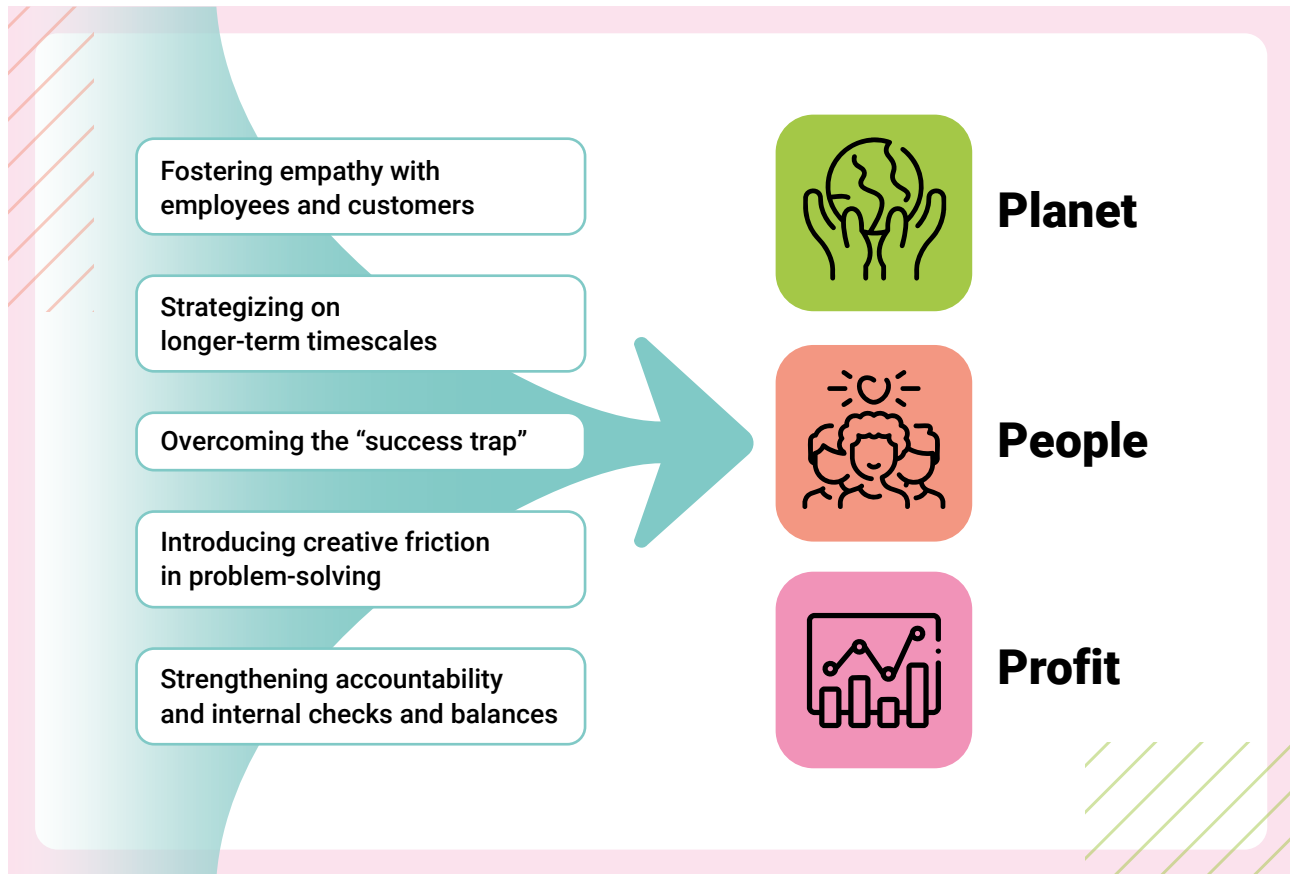
The 2025 Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow Report¹⁹ – a global survey of emerging policymakers, entrepreneurs and researchers under 35 and of senior global C-suite executives, conducted by the Nuremberg Institute for Market Decisions and the St. Gallen Symposium – finds that today's senior managers may see less of an urgency to close this gap: 11% of the leaders of tomorrow versus 37% of senior executives viewed intergenerational leadership as widespread (42% of the latter think it is "moderately" common).

At the same time, they could be more receptive to intergenerational leadership than younger

generations may assume: A whopping 92% of senior executives think that intergenerational collaboration enhances leadership effectiveness – and 51% of them also believe that their peers are either extremely or somewhat receptive to the idea of moving towards intergenerational decision-making.

As the following section will show, involving younger generations more meaningfully in decision-making is not simply a matter of equity. Diverse generational perspectives can unlock competitive advantages and enhance social responsibility and ecological impact.

How Intergenerational Leadership Drives Success



Enabling young people to actively participate in decisions that impact their lives is a moral imperative. But mounting evidence shows that closing the intergenerational leadership gap is a **smart business move** as well. It drives innovation, long-term financial success, regenerative value creation and social responsibility. Integrating intergenerational leadership positively impacts the dynamism of businesses in five ways.

Five Decision-Making Dynamics

Fostering empathy with employees and customers: Age-diverse environments validate different life stages and experiences and empower

all employees to contribute. Younger “digital natives” can help businesses keep track of cultural and technological shifts and reach new customers. Age discrimination has been found to be the most common form of workplace discrimination.²⁰ Intergenerational leadership can ensure an inclusive workplace, enhance staff retention²¹ and prepare young talent for additional leadership roles.

Strategizing on longer-term timescales: An aging leadership may be more concerned with short-term results than with long-term benefits that will not manifest during their tenure while younger professionals may be more open to pursuing long-term payoffs.²² Intergenerational leadership can balance short-term pressures, like meeting quarterly targets, with long-term imperatives,

such as adapting to technological disruptions or climate change.

Overcoming the “success trap”: Sticking to mental models that have underpinned past successes may risk succumbing to the “success trap”. As a 2023 analysis in the *Harvard Business Review* finds: “When circumstances are changing, old paradigms ... can obstruct progress precisely when new ideas and thinking are urgently required.”²³ Age-diverse top management teams excel at “ambidextrous learning” – drawing from established know-how while at the same time exploring new ideas.²⁴ Younger leaders counterbalance experience with curiosity and institutional knowledge with the ability to question the status quo.

Introducing creative friction in problem-solving:

Age-diverse leadership teams integrate diverse skills and viewpoints into decision-making, which can facilitate productive friction. Creative friction has helped firms address unique problems, for

example those posed by Covid-19.²⁵ At the team or project level, inclusive environments enhance team identification, collaboration and effectiveness.²⁶ At the management level, age diversity ensures the retention of know-how and tacit knowledge from one generation to the next.²⁷ Properly managed, age diversity on company boards can constitute “the best of all worlds” as each generation brings specific knowledge to the table.

Strengthening commitment and internal checks and balances:

Intergenerational leadership enhances businesses’ ambition and commitment to environmental and social concerns. Younger board members have been found to be more concerned about the environment and sustainability.²⁸ Age diversity also helps prevent corporate misconduct: Diverse perspectives create more robust checks and balances, and younger directors tend to be more invested in the business’s reputation.²⁹ Integrating different values can build a company’s social capital and ability to make decisions about how to be a good corporate citizen.³⁰





Driving Impact Across Three Main Areas

In combination, these five mechanisms can help businesses positively impact:

The planet: Intergenerational leadership has been found to foster regenerative value creation and sustainable business model innovation (SBMI). SBMI involves fundamentally rethinking profit-making models and incorporating sustainability into the core of the firm. The greater commitment and ability to question old mental models associated with age-diverse teams help drive such holistic change.³¹ Due to their facilitation of ambidextrous learning, intergenerational leadership teams are also better equipped to drive the adoption and development of sustainable technologies critical for future success.³²

People: The most consistent findings relate to the effect of age-diverse leadership teams on companies' corporate social responsibility (CSR) performance. A recent review of the literature found an association between more age-diverse boards and the adoption of management practices integrating social, ethical and environmental concerns.³³ There are also positive effects on

organizational culture: A leadership team that mirrors the composition of the workforce facilitates an age-inclusive work climate and improved collaboration in teams.³⁴

Profit: A simple association between age-diverse leadership and financial performance is difficult to establish, but research finds that intergenerational leadership drives longer-term economic success by creating environments conducive to technological advancement and innovative practices.³⁵ Research from 2023 found a statistically significant negative relationship between CEO age and corporate vitality, which is a measure of long-term growth potential.³⁶ An analysis of Europe's fastest-growing companies indicated that while diversity alone did not correlate with growth, age diversity among board members played a crucial role in driving company performance. Organizations with age-diverse leadership will, then, tend to have better prospects for sustained growth.³⁷ Companies with higher age diversity at the board level have, up to a certain point, been found to benefit from improved long-term financial health, as measured by the solvency ratio.³⁸ This suggests that there might be an ideal level of age diversity that maximizes financial resilience.

Making Intergenerational Leadership Work: Three Approaches

As we have shown, greater intergenerational leadership is not only beneficial for employees, societies and the planet but also for long-term economic success. Yet organizations across the private, public and non-profit sectors have not prioritized it. Businesses who mainstream intergenerational leadership will benefit from the

dynamics discussed above, building a sustainable competitive advantage. How can organizations capitalize on this opportunity?

Intergenerational leadership is not yet a well-defined space of action. We suggest **three main approaches**, which increase in ambition, breadth and depth.

Approach 1: Consultation

In this first approach, senior leadership systemically consults young generations in strategic direction-setting. Typically, this focuses on employees from within the organization, but businesses can also find ways to involve external emerging talent. Examples of consultation programs that have gained recent prominence include reverse and cross-generational mentoring and shadow boards.³⁹ These mechanisms pair executive teams and corporate boards up with sparring partners who introduce fresh and critical perspectives. Consultation also strengthens the pipeline of leadership talent within an organization.

In **reverse mentoring**, a senior leader benefits from the perspectives and skills of a more junior colleague. A reverse mentoring program can drive culture change, promote diversity, strengthen awareness of emerging strategic issues and increase knowledge of specific topics (for example, technology). It also increases engagement among and retention of younger employees.⁴⁰ **Cross-generational mentoring**, in turn, is based on the mutual exchange of knowledge and learning; participants serve as mentor and mentee on specific issues.

There are several key steps for successfully setting up reverse mentoring programs:

- Ensure **leaders and younger employees are equally involved** in shaping the initiative.
- Ensure the **expectations about objectives and roles** of both mentors and mentees are aligned. Consider drawing up a mentorship charter to provide a clear framework and to drive a positive mindset.
- Mentor and mentee need to **free up sufficient time** to build a good rapport.
- Bring more experienced and more junior mentors together to share **insights and best practices** about effective mentoring.
- **Mentors and mentees must be actively engaged** to foster a successful relationship. They will need to set their own priorities and define their interaction model. Frequent check-ins and surveys will help evaluate the success of the program and enhance it where required.



Example: Reverse mentoring in the financial industry

A leading global bank wanted to use reverse mentorship as a catalyst for “interhuman connections.” Members were selected from top leadership and from management to participate in the six-month project. The mentor and mentee teams drafted clear agreements that covered everything from the frequency and type of meeting, to issues to cover, to alignment between roles.

Mentors met frequently to discuss and establish best practices, and the bank checked in with mentees. The bank fine-tuned the program on an ongoing basis. After this initial six-month period, the exchange between mentor and mentee was free-flowing and continued independently.

Reverse mentoring has expanded across the organization, and younger colleagues can apply for the program, enabling the bank to identify emerging talent. A senior leader explained: “Reverse mentoring expanded the capabilities of senior leadership. It motivated junior talents to step up and take a role in drafting the organization of the future. Reflection and honest feedback bring a lot to the entire organization.”



So-called **shadow boards**, or **next-generation advisory boards**, gather young and motivated individuals to act as sparring partners for the executive committee or board.⁴¹ They expose leadership to **emerging trends and next-generation perspectives**, helping to inform strategic reinvention.

Shadow boards work well when it comes to specific initiatives, such as developing a new marketing plan, redesigning a business model or updating the value chain. Follow-up from top leadership will ensure shadow boards do not become “hollow structures”.



Example: A sparring partner at a consulting firm

A global consulting firm successfully implemented a shadow board in early 2020 amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The board consisted of six women and four men from seven cities across three continents and met virtually. It served a dual function:

- » **Advisory:** It conducted a strategic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis.
- » **Project implementation:** It developed the company's purpose statement and formed an ethics committee.

In addition to developing the purpose statement, the board specified how the purpose could be integrated into daily operations, client engagements and long-term strategic planning. The ethics committee helped create a framework to ensure that the firm's practices aligned with its values. The committee addressed issues such as transparency in client relationships and the responsible use of data and technology in branding strategies.

The CEO met with board members monthly, and board members dedicated approximately four hours per week to the program. Leadership and strategic skills improved, and all members were promoted during their tenure. One executive shared that the shadow board has "established itself as a leading and influential light across the firm's global network."



Reverse mentoring and shadow boards can demonstrate the tangible benefits of intergenerational leadership to executives and the wider organization. Generally, these benefits have related to innovation,

technology, organizational culture and nurturing the leadership pipeline. Incorporating environmental and social responsibility into organizations is rarer, with one notable exception.



Example: Purpose beyond profit in biotech

For a fast-growing biotech and pharmaceutical company, creating value beyond profit was the next step after achieving B Corp certification. When the CEO set up an advisory board, he aspired for an intergenerational composition; he wanted productive friction and a key stakeholder to ensure the sustainable and responsible conduct of the business. The resulting board effectively balanced the company's impact on people, planet and patients with its focus on profit.



In consultative approaches, the mentor or senior executive typically retains ultimate decision-making power. When ideas requiring substantial change are

proposed, such approaches risk encouraging "talk" without corresponding "action". For real change, going beyond consultation may be necessary.

Approach 2: Co-Leadership and Shared Decision-Making

The second approach goes beyond consultation: **through co-leadership, different generations share decision-making power.** Co-leadership combines fresh perspectives with seasoned expertise and nurtures the next generation of leaders. It plays a role at every level, including:

- **the executive (C-suite) level**, which determines strategy and sets the tone for the organization's culture.
- **middle management**, which plays a critical role in operationalizing strategy and building teams. Here, shared decision-making establishes a learning culture and improves team resilience.
- **at the project level**, where younger leaders get hands-on experience in high-stakes environments in, for example, **cross-generational innovation teams** that tackle specific strategic, tech or culture initiatives.



Example: Pairing innovation with a steady hand in the tech industry

Few industries have been as dramatically shaped by young, disruptive founders as the tech industry. Many develop their technologies during university. To develop a viable business model, they need knowledge of the market and an influential network.

Two founders of a global tech firm needed an experienced CEO to complement their skill sets and to convince investors of the firm's future prospects. They faced the common dilemma of balancing seasoned leadership with the disruptive creativity of the founders. Once they chose a CEO, they focused on navigating this dilemma: The co-founders took the lead on the technology and the more senior CEO focused on customer relations and communications critical to building a successful corporate brand.



Another important decision-making body which can benefit from diverse generational perspectives is the **corporate board** (i.e. the "supervisory board" or "board of directors"). The board approves the company strategy and ensures that it is run in the best interest of share- and stakeholders. Key tasks include oversight and governance, monitoring and managing risk, legal and regulatory compliance, and appointing and evaluating executives.

These boards are open to external, independent members, providing an opportunity to bring in younger perspectives. Efforts by younger members to challenge conventional thinking, improve risk assessment and align long-term strategies with emerging trends may result in **"constructive disharmony" in the boardroom.**⁴²



Example: Bringing young voices to the boardroom

A leading telecommunications company appointed a young entrepreneur in her early 30s to its board of directors in 2020. The young founder and CEO of a digital network contributed her knowledge of the business landscape, an entrepreneurial mindset and an understanding of the next generation of customers and employees. Her appointment led to significant change, including the introduction of a parental leave policy for directors.

The appointment was embedded in a broader intergenerational leadership approach. One program put millennial employees in a management role for a day. A youth advisory council elevated youth insights on their experiences in and aspirations for the digital world. An annual research study monitored young people's relationships with digital technology.

This intergenerational approach has driven innovation and profitability, including via the development of AI-powered solutions for customer engagement and operational efficiency.



Example: Welcoming an external next-generation board member to a family business

A family hardware and DIY business with around 5,000 employees sought a new board member to help them attract a younger customer base. The aim was to innovate offerings, improve online experience and focus on sustainability across its supply and value chain. Having mapped the competencies of its board, the president decided that inviting a younger person to join made the best business sense, and the company finally selected a social entrepreneur. The new board member helped pilot and implement projects key to the future success of the business.



Young leaders on board

For companies interested in strengthening their board's role in enabling long-term value creation, the "Young Leaders on Board" project, a joint initiative of the St. Gallen Symposium and Zukunft-Fabrik. 2050, works to identify outstanding individuals between 35 and 45 years old who can add the greatest value to a company. More information can be found at symposium.org/ylob.

Approach 3: Embedding Intergenerational Leadership

Both consultation and co-leadership approaches can add significant value for organizations. But to unlock the full potential of intergenerational collaboration, a holistic approach **embedding intergenerational leadership** at the strategic, structural and cultural levels should be taken.

Strategies specify sources of future success and sustained value creation. Organizations should consider how intergenerational leadership might tangibly achieve strategic goals. For example, if an organization has a talent strategy, age diversity should be factored in as an aspect of inclusion and belonging.

An organization's **structure** shapes the way competencies and responsibilities are distributed and interlinked. Moving away from traditional hierarchical models towards more participatory, decentralized structures can empower younger employees to take on more responsibility; this flexibility makes organizations more responsive to rapid change.

To embed intergenerational collaboration into an organization's **culture**, organizations can integrate practices that foster mutual learning and shared decision-making into routines and standard procedures. These practices become a part of how people work and solve problems daily. To this end, staffing age-diverse teams or encouraging leaders to seek input across age groups can prove effective.



Taking Action: How to Move Forward Tomorrow

This report has underlined the tangible benefits of intergenerational leadership for businesses. Businesses can draw on the three approaches –

consultation, co-leadership and embedding – to begin. In addition, here are some key learnings:

Make a business case for intergenerational leadership:

To avoid “tokenism” and ensure efficacy, organizations should establish a compelling business case outlining the gaps and strategic goals that intergenerational leadership and decision-making will address. As our review of the research has shown, these might include:

- the cultivation of a more agile approach to innovation
- implementing more ambitious sustainability strategies
- recruiting talent by changing the organization’s purpose and work culture
- developing the organization’s next generation of leadership

Starting questions:

- How do the demographics of the leadership teams compare to those of employees, customers and stakeholders?
- What current set of skills and experiences does the leadership have?
- Where might intergenerational leadership add the biggest value?

Design a targeted approach appropriate to the context:

To achieve identified goals, organizations should choose models suited to their specific context. They should be pragmatic: Formal co-leadership structures may not always work. For example, if extending full board membership to a young leader is unrealistic (as it may be in publicly listed companies), businesses may add “permanent guests” or “strategic advisors” to the board or to specific sub-committees. These members will not have voting rights, but their input can still be taken up by decision-makers.

Starting questions:

- Is the goal to foster specific skills and knowledge at the individual level? Would reverse mentoring be the best approach?
- Is the goal to tackle strategic issues? Could a next generation advisory board take the lead on particular initiatives or would co-leadership teams work better?
- How might intergenerational leadership be mainstreamed?



Define and support the desired skill set:

Younger perspectives should be incorporated into leadership because of the unique competencies and cognitive diversity they bring to decision-making. To avoid overlooking young leaders, organizations should empower them with the tools to succeed; for example, executive education programs might prepare new board members.

Starting questions:

- What skills, competencies and viewpoints would add the greatest value and enable creative friction in leadership teams?
- How can new members be best prepared during onboarding?

Rally and sustain support for intergenerational leadership:

Experience is seen as the most fundamental criterion for selecting leaders, particularly in high-stakes business environments. Efforts towards intergenerational leadership, particularly if they go beyond consultation, may meet resistance. Strong and determined advocacy to rally and sustain support for change must be deployed.

Again, context matters. Board positions in publicly listed companies are determined through sophisticated shareholder voting procedures, which differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. A plethora of actors within and outside the firm are involved, requiring a strong advocating role of board presidents. Family businesses and private (i.e. not

publicly traded) companies may be more independent from the immediate pressures of shareholders. This independence can foster longer-term strategies, and communicating tangible goals and early successes can help stakeholders understand the benefits of intergenerational leadership.

Starting questions:

- Who has potential reservations and why?
- How might the reasons for and benefits of intergenerational leadership be communicated effectively?

Bridge potential gaps in communication styles, work values and cultural expectations:

Intergenerational leadership is challenging. The Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow Report 2025 asked respondents which barriers they see to intergenerational decision-making. For both generations, different communication styles and conflicting work values and cultural expectations (in terms of hierarchy and respect) were seen as key sources of friction.⁴³ By cultivating an environment of mutual respect, shared learning and improved communication, intergenerational teams can bridge differences and achieve sustainable success.

Starting questions:

- How might differences in communication, values or expectations pose challenges to intergenerational collaboration?
- How can expectations be shaped and frictions addressed within the leadership team?



By embedding diverse generational perspectives into decision-making at every level, businesses can unlock innovation, enhance resilience and build a more inclusive and forward-thinking culture. While still a relatively new (and untapped) opportunity, companies that embrace this shift will be best positioned to navigate the complexities of the future while reaping tangible benefits for the planet, people and profit.

References

1. **United Nations (2023).** Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision-making Processes. Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 3. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4009368?ln=en&v=pdf>
2. **Inter-Parliamentary Union (2023).** Youth Participation in National Parliaments 2023. https://iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/20231016_ipu_youthreport_en_lr.pdf
3. **Financial Times (2024).** Youth vs the gerontocrats: a potent political force tests Africa's ageing rulers. <https://www.ft.com/content/b9198e0f-379c-4c80-9171-58e1c820e655>
4. **CristKolder (2024).** Volatility Report 2024. <https://www.cristkolder.com/volatility-report>
5. **Price, R. (2024)** America's corporate gerontocracy. Business Insider. <https://www.businessinsider.com/joe-biden-corporate-gerontocracy-aging-ceos-retirement-succession-replacement-2024-8>
6. **SpencerStuart (2023).** 2023 U.S. Spencer Stuart Board Index. https://www.spencerstuart.com/-/media/2023/september/usbi/2023_us_spencer_stuart_board_index.pdf
7. **Alliance Bernstein (2024).** The Case for Multigenerational Boards. <https://www.alliancebernstein.com/corporate/en/insights/investment-insights/the-case-for-multigenerational-corporate-boards.html>
8. **United Nations (2024).** World Population Prospects 2024. <https://population.un.org/wpp/>
9. **Heidrick & Struggles (2023).** Route to the top: Interactive Dashboard 2023. https://www.heidrick.com/en/insights/chief-executive-officer/route-to-the-top_interactive-dashboard-2023
10. **Statista (2024, August 12).** Median age of the global labor force in years 1990-2025. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/996530/median-age-global-labor-force-years/>
11. **Board Ex (2025, January).** Data Feeds. BoardEx Europe. <https://boardex.com/products/data-feeds>
12. **SpencerStuart (2022).** 2022 Singapore Spencer Stuart Board Index. https://www.spencerstuart.com/-/media/2022/november/singaporebi/singapore_spencer_stuart_board_index_2022.pdf
13. **Tsutsumi, K. (2025, February 23).** As Japan's boardrooms gray, Sanrio bucks trend with younger directors. Nikkei Asia. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Companies/As-Japan-s-boardrooms-gray-Sanrio-bucks-trend-with-younger-directors>
14. **Spencer Stuart (2017).** 2017 Brasil Board Index. <https://www.spencerstuart.com/-/media/pdf%20files/research%20and%20insight%20pdfs/bi-brazil-2017.pdf>
15. **Spencer Stuart (2024).** 2024 Spencer Stuart Board Index. <https://www.spencerstuart.com/research-and-insight/boards-around-the-world?category=all-board-composition&topic=director-age¤cy=all>
16. **Spencer Stuart (2023).** 2023 South Africa Spencer Stuart Board Index. <https://www.spencerstuart.com/research-and-insight/south-africa-board-index/board-composition>
17. **Kapoor, S. & Jain, S. (2024).** Deciphering the Indian boardroom: Russell Reynolds Associates' 2024 India Board Analytics & Insights. <https://www.russellreynolds.com/en/insights/reports-surveys/deciphering-the-indian-boardroom-2024-board-analytics-insights>
18. **Deloitte (2022).** Progress at a snail's pace. <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/ar/Documents/risk/2022/arg-2022-Women-in-the-boardroom.pdf>
19. **Buder, F., Rüdiger, F., Dietrich, H. (2025).** Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow: Navigating global power shifts. Nuremberg Institute for Market Decisions & St. Gallen Symposium. <https://symposium.org/insights/voices/>
20. **OECD (2020).** Promoting an Age-Inclusive Workforce: Living, Learning and Earning Longer. OECD Publishing, Paris. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2020/12/promoting-an-age-inclusive-workforce_835228f0/59752153-en.pdf
21. **Kunze, F., Boehm, S. A. & Bruch, H. (2011).** Age diversity, age discrimination climate and performance consequences—a cross organizational study. Journal of organizational behavior, 32(2), 264-290.
22. **Reeves, M., Rüdiger, F., Job, A. & Boulenger, A. (2023).** Businesses need to bring younger employees into their leadership ranks. Harvard Business Review. hbr.org/2023/10/businesses-need-to-bring-younger-employees-into-their-leadership-ranks?ab=HP-hero-latest-text-1
23. **Reeves, M., Rüdiger, F., Job, A. & Boulenger, A. (2023).** Businesses need to bring younger employees into their leadership ranks. Harvard Business Review. hbr.org/2023/10/businesses-need-to-bring-younger-employees-into-their-leadership-ranks?ab=HP-hero-latest-text-1
24. **Dhir, D., Khan, S.J., Islam, N., Ractham, P. & Meenakshi, N. (2023).** Drivers of sustainable business model innovations: An upper echelon theory perspective. Technological Forecasting and Social Change. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2023.122409>
25. **Plecnik, J. & Wang, S. (2024).** The effects of top management team age diversity during a crisis: Evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic. Journal of Management Accounting Research. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4879806>
26. **Wu, X. & Konrad, A. M. (2021).** Does age diversity benefit team outcomes, if so, when and how? A moderated mediation model. Academy of Management Journal. <https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.2021.62>
27. **Gerhardt, M. W., Nachemson-Ekwall, J. & Fogel, B. (2022).** Harnessing the power of age diversity. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2022/03/harnessing-the-power-of-age-diversity>

28. **Janahi, M., Millo, Y. & Voulgaris, G. (2022).** Age diversity and the monitoring role of corporate boards: Evidence from banks. *Human Relations*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267221108729>
29. **Neukirchen, D., Posch, P. N. & Betzer, A. (2022).** Board Age Diversity and Corporate Misconduct. SSRN. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4099382>; **Janahi, M., Millo, Y. & Voulgaris, G. (2022).** Age diversity and the monitoring role of corporate boards: Evidence from banks. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267221108729>
30. **Collecchio, F., Temperini, V., Barba-Sanchez, V. & Meseguer-Martinez, A. (2024).** Sustainable Governance: Board Sustainability Experience and the Interplay with Board Age for Firm Sustainability. *Journal of Business Ethics*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-024-05739-3>
31. **Dhir, D., Khan, S.J., Islam, N., Ractham, P. & Meenakshi, N. (2023).** Drivers of sustainable business model innovations. An upper echelon theory perspective. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2023.122409>
32. **Zaman, R., Asiaei, K., Nadeem, M., Malik, I. & Arif, M. (2023).** Board demographic, structural diversity, and eco-innovation: International evidence. *Corporate Governance An International Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/corg.12545>; **Galia, F. (2013).** Does board diversity influence innovation? The impact of gender and age diversity on innovation types. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Does-board-diversity-influence-innovation-The-of-on-Galia/57435510232575a5ac7a60ef7fda03b476b79942>
33. **Gardiner, E. (2022).** What's age got to do with it? The effect of board member age diversity: a systematic review. *Management Review Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-022-00294-5>
34. **Boehm, S. A., Kunze, F. & Bruch, H. (2013).** Spotlight on age-diversity climate: The impact of age-inclusive HR practices on firm-level outcomes. *Personnel Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12047>
35. **Tabaku, K. (2024).** The importance of intergenerational leadership in organizations. *Social Leadership*. https://scholars.unh.edu/ms_leadership/129/
36. **Reeves, M. & Job, A. (2023).** Why companies need more age diversity in their leadership ranks. *Fortune*. <https://fortune.com/2023/12/18/future-50-ceos-leadership-age-diversity-bcg/>
37. **Lippi, A., Torelli, R. & Caccialanza, A. (2023).** Relationship between governance diversity and company growth: Evidence from the FT 1000 Europe's fastest growing companies. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Relationship-between-governance-diversity-and-from-Lippi-To-relli/6ea068aa21caa339c5438787b7a1e7d979c28d7d>
38. **PricewaterhouseCoopers (2023).** The value of age diversity: Companies with age diverse boards are less risky and more resilient. <https://www.pwc.nl/actueel-publicaties/assets/pdfs/age-diversity.pdf>
39. Both sections benefit from previous research conducted by the St. Gallen Symposium and BCG: **Rüdiger, F., Kessler, D. & Schnigula, C. (2022).** Leveraging the power of cross-generational teams. <https://symposium.org/leveraging-the-power-of-cross-generational-teams/>
40. **Gadomska-Lila, K. (2020).** Effectiveness of reverse mentoring in creating intergenerational relationships. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jocm-10-2019-0326>
41. **Jordan, J. & Sorell, M. (2019).** Why you should create a "shadow board" of younger employees. *Harvard Business Review*. hbr.org/2019/06/why-you-should-create-a-shadow-board-of-younger-employees
42. **Menne, S. (2023).** The power of constructive disharmony in the boardroom. *IMD*. <https://www.imd.org/ibyimd/magazine/the-power-of-constructive-disharmony-in-the-boardroom/>
43. **Buder, F., Rüdiger, F., Dietrich, H. (2025).** Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow: Navigating global power shifts. *Nuremberg Institute for Market Decisions & St. Gallen Symposium*. <https://symposium.org/insights/voices/>

Image Credits

- Cover:** All images courtesy of St. Gallen Symposium
- Page 2:** Both images courtesy of St. Gallen Symposium
- Page 9:** All images courtesy of United Nations Youth Office
- Page 10:** All images courtesy of United Nations Youth Office
- Page 12:** Both images courtesy of St. Gallen Symposium
- Page 16:** All images courtesy of United Nations Youth Office
- Page 18:** Left image courtesy of United Nations Youth Office, right image courtesy of St. Gallen Symposium
- Page 19:** All images courtesy of United Nations Youth Office

UN Youth Office

As the first dedicated entity for youth affairs within the United Nations Secretariat, the UN Youth Office champions the rights, perspectives, contributions and potential of young people everywhere. We lead efforts to enhance collaboration, coordination and accountability on youth affairs, ensuring that the United Nations works effectively and inclusively with young people in all their diversity. By fostering meaningful, inclusive and impactful participation of youth in decision-making processes, our work focuses on empowering young people as agents of transformative change in addressing global challenges in the areas of sustainable development, peace and security, human rights and humanitarian action.

www.un.org/youthaffairs

The Club of Rome

The Club of Rome is a platform of diverse thought leaders who identify holistic solutions to complex global issues and promote policy initiatives and action to enable humanity to emerge from multiple planetary emergencies. The organisation has prioritised five key areas of impact: Emerging New Civilisations; Planetary Emergency; Reframing Economics; Rethinking Finance; and Youth Leadership and Intergenerational Dialogues.

www.clubofrome.org

St. Gallen Symposium

The St. Gallen Symposium is one of the world's leading initiatives for cross-generational dialogue. Our goal is to promote more responsible, long-term leadership, by fostering meaningful and critical engagement between generations. Founded in 1969, the initiative is driven by a team of about 25 students, the International Students' Committee, and a team of professionals, the St. Gallen Foundation for International Studies. Our annual main symposium brings together around 700 senior executives from business and policy with 200 young change-makers from around the world at the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland. We actively promote sustainability and long-term thinking through intergenerational leadership.

<https://symposium.org/>



United Nations
Youth Office



ST.GALLEN
SYMPOSIUM