

Keynote Speech

Mr. Gilbert Ghostine

We are honored to welcome Gilbert Ghostine, President of the Fondation pour l'attractivité du canton de Genève (FLAG), Chairman of the Board of Directors of Sandoz, Chairman Nominee of SGS SA, and member of the Boards of Directors of Danone and Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts.

Drawing on his extensive leadership experience, including his tenure as CEO of Firmenich, he will offer a **brief opening perspective to frame the evening and share his reflections and testimony**



TALENT SYNERGIZER 2026 by the Geneva EMBA

Navigating Uncertainty



From left to right: Jean-Yves Mercier (EMBA Director), Karine Curti (FLAG Director), Gilbert Ghostine (FLAG Chairman), David Hanhart (Head of Talent Synergizer)

Introduction

Against a global backdrop marked by recurrent systemic shocks — geopolitical instability, accelerating technological change, economic pressures and profound organizational reconfigurations — the ability to act amid uncertainty has become a strategic competence of the first order. It was from this perspective that the 2026 edition of the Talent Synergizer was held, under the aegis of the Executive MBA Alumni Association of the University of Geneva.

The event stood out through its distinctive methodological architecture, built around the Conversation Café. This format deliberately gave priority to collective deliberation in small groups rather than any form of top-down knowledge transmission. It made it possible to mobilize situated experiences from a wide range of sectors and to bring out analytical convergences around highly complex issues.

The opening address by Gilbert Ghostine, President of the Foundation for the Attractiveness of the Canton of Geneva (FLAG) and of the listed companies Sandoz and SGS, gave a clear direction to the discussions. Speaking to the students and attendees, he immediately set out a

central conviction : uncertainty is not an obstacle to be bypassed, but the very terrain on which leadership is exercised.

In an environment marked by geopolitical tensions, deep economic transformations and unprecedented technological acceleration, Gilbert Ghostine invited the audience to make a radical shift in perspective : to focus on what can truly be mastered and to view volatility not as a threat, but as an opportunity for repositioning.

This conceptual reversal structured his entire address around three dimensions. First, the importance of intention : when the environment becomes unstable, an organization's values and purpose become essential points of reference. Second, the role of dialogue : in ambiguity, the quality of human exchanges helps to interpret weak signals more effectively. Finally, self-knowledge : understanding one's biases and emotional reactions becomes essential in order to avoid decisions driven by fear or habit.

This analytical framework ran through all the discussions, which were organized around four dimensions of resilience : perceiving (See), deciding (Act), sustaining (Sustain) and transforming (Evolve).

Individual resilience and collective capacity

During the roundtable discussions, the exchanges called into question an idea that is still widely held : that resilience is purely individual.

What emerged from the discussions was a much broader vision. Resilience appears as a complex phenomenon, mobilizing psychological resources, cognitive capacities and ethical points of reference. Above all, however, it is not built alone.

One point stood out strongly : resilience is systemic. Individual behaviors, particularly those of leaders, directly influence the collective. In times of crisis, a leader's emotional stability can structure action, provide reassurance and set direction. Conversely, an unstable stance can amplify tensions and disorganize responses.

The exchanges also highlighted the importance of relational networks. Resilience does not develop in isolation : it relies on support ecosystems, whether formal or informal, that make it possible to absorb shocks and rebuild.

Another significant element concerned the way uncertainty is perceived. When uncertainty is seen as a threat, it tends to block action. But as soon as it is reframed as a space of opportunity, it opens up new strategic perspectives.

One question nevertheless remains open : is resilience necessarily the product of adversity, or can it be developed proactively, outside any crisis ?

Decision-making in uncertain environments

The discussions converged around a challenge to the classical decision-making paradigm, which is based on the availability of complete information. In a context of uncertainty, decision-making is less about eliminating uncertainty than about learning to function with it.

In this context, one practice stands out: making explicit the assumptions on which a decision is based. This approach not only helps to structure action, but also makes it possible to learn retrospectively by comparing initial assumptions with reality.

Participants also emphasized the complementarity between analytical reasoning and expert intuition. Far from being opposed, these two modes of processing information prove particularly complementary in situations where deliberation time is constrained.

Organizational strategies aimed at absorbing uncertainty were also discussed, such as operational redundancy and the decentralization of decision-making capacities.

The collective dimension of decision-making was widely valued: dialogue was seen as an effective mechanism for reducing uncertainty and strengthening the legitimacy of the trade-offs made.

A structural tension nevertheless emerged between institutional prudence, attached to the consolidation of processes, and the need to act quickly in the face of evolving situations. This duality is a reminder of the irreducibly contextual nature of decision-making practices.





Resilience and innovation : a constitutive tension

Another central theme was the sometimes conflictual relationship between resilience and innovation.

Innovation often means taking risks, exploring the unknown and moving beyond established frameworks. Resilience, by contrast, is often associated with stability and the ability to withstand shocks.

Participants acknowledged that resilience and innovation can come into contradiction, particularly when innovation involves high exposure to risk that is difficult to anticipate.

The distinction between incremental innovation and disruptive innovation made it possible to nuance this opposition : not all forms of innovation involve the same level of risk, nor the same requirements in terms of tolerance for uncertainty.

Organizational culture proved decisive in this relationship to innovation. Implicit norms regarding failure have a deep influence on behavior, either stimulating or inhibiting initiative-taking. The discussions also underlined the importance of organizational design, and in particular of separating, at least partially, exploration activities from day-to-day operations, so as to preserve one without sacrificing the other.

A delicate question remains : that of middle managers. Caught between sometimes contradictory injunctions — to innovate while ensuring continuity — they rarely have sufficient room for maneuver to arbitrate calmly.



Architecture of resilient organizations

The exchanges made it possible to identify several organizational levers likely to strengthen resilience. A culture of error was recognized as a central element : turning failures into learning opportunities is an essential condition for adaptability.

The diversity of profiles was also identified as a key factor, insofar as a plurality of perspectives enriches the collective capacity to interpret situations and respond to them in differentiated ways.

One notable contribution concerned the role of informal spaces for exchange, which are often underestimated but are essential to the circulation of information and to the gradual construction of trust.

Participants also emphasized institutional integrity, understood as an organization's capacity to stay true to its values under the pressure of external contingencies.

Concrete tools were finally mentioned, foremost among them scenario planning, which makes it possible to anticipate contrasting future configurations and to prepare appropriate responses even before events occur.

The question of the impact of artificial intelligence on professional trajectories and on the development of fundamental competencies remained open, signaling a topic of growing importance for the years ahead.

General Conclusion

The Talent Synergizer 2026 highlighted a profound shift in the way uncertainty is approached. **Uncertainty is no longer perceived as a problem to be solved, but as a structural reality to be integrated.**

Resilience thus appears as a multi-level phenomenon, at the intersection of individuals, collectives and structures. It extends far beyond the realm of technical skills, touching on ways of thinking and relational dynamics.

Values play a central role in this balance, offering stable points of reference in a changing environment.

The tensions identified — between stability and innovation, control and autonomy, prudence and risk-taking — do not disappear. On the contrary, they become constitutive elements of organizational functioning, to be managed over time.

Finally, one idea stands out : **resilience is fundamentally collective.** It rests on interactions, networks and spaces for dialogue that are often invisible, yet essential.

Beyond the observations made, the event also opened up new perspectives. The impact of technological transformations, particularly artificial intelligence, and the need to maintain strong collaborative dynamics appear as major challenges.

Ultimately, resilience can no longer be viewed as a stable state to be achieved. It is part of a continuous process of adaptation, learning and transformation. A dynamic that invites organizations to change their perspective : **no longer to endure uncertainty, but to learn to turn it into a strategic lever.**





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