

TALENT SYNERGIZER 2025 of the Geneva EMBA

Self-Leadership vs Servant Leadership

#How have you seen servant
and self-leadership impact on
organization's performance?
* Get through difficult times

How are these two leadership
approaches perceived and
practiced across different cultural,
generational, and industrial context?

* Know your customer

* AGCP \Rightarrow Servant

When have you seen leadership
values clash with business demands?

* I think...
* ...!

rocarda





Introduction

The Talent Synergizer 2025, organized on March 27, 2025, by the Executive MBA program of the University of Geneva, was held at the Hive Innovation Lab. This evening of discussions and collective reflection aimed to explore emerging leadership paradigms, with a particular focus on the interplay between self-leadership (leading oneself) and servant leadership (leading in service of others). The event gathered around fifty EMBA students and alumni, along with about thirty representatives from local companies across various sectors.

Structured around small group workshops and a plenary synthesis session, the event produced a set of insights rooted in experience and reflections on the evolving nature of leadership in contemporary organizations.

Summary of Discussions

The overall analysis of the contributions highlighted a progressive redefinition of leadership as a relational, adaptive, and introspective process. Discussions confirmed that self-leadership and servant leadership should not be seen as opposing approaches but rather as complementary dimensions of modern leadership. The ability to lead oneself, demonstrate self-awareness, set personal boundaries, and self-regulate appears to be a prerequisite for leadership oriented toward others. Leadership focused on listening, supporting, and empowering teams can only be fully exercised if the leader has a solid personal foundation.

This complementarity between inner work and collective engagement is based on a flexible managerial stance, capable of adjusting to contexts, team profiles, and organizational cycles. Several participants emphasized the value of an “ambidextrous” leadership style, able to alternate or even combine different approaches depending on the situation.

Developing this adaptability largely relies on emotional intelligence, identified unanimously as a key leadership competency today. It not only enables better understanding of one’s own reactions but also helps create a climate of trust that fosters collaboration. In this perspective, vulnerability is no longer seen as a weakness but as a relational resource : acknowledging doubts, embracing tensions, and being open to feedback are attitudes that strengthen the quality of the bond between managers and their teams.

However, participants also stressed that these practices must account for cultural differences. A leadership style that emphasizes listening and cooperation could, in some contexts, be interpreted as a lack of authority. Leadership effectiveness thus also depends on the ability to understand implicit expectations, adapt to local norms, and balance one’s professional ethics with the organization’s culture. In an increasingly globalized workforce, intercultural awareness has become essential for credibility and impact.

Values also played a central role in the discussions. For leadership to be recognized and mobilizing, it must align with an organizational culture based on clear principles : respect, coherence, integrity, and responsibility. These values must be collectively defined but, more importantly, translated into actions. It is not enough to state them ; they must be embodied daily. Expressions like “walk the talk” and “show, don’t tell” were frequently mentioned, underscoring the importance of aligning words and actions. A credible leader is one who acts consistently with the messages they promote.

This need for alignment ties into the frequently discussed issue of personal well-being. A strong idea emerged : a leader cannot effectively support their teams without first taking care of themselves. As the saying goes, “You can’t pour from an empty cup.” Practices such as taking a step back, managing priorities, and creating moments for mental and emotional renewal were highlighted as important levers for maintaining stable, committed leadership in demanding environments.

Similarly, building a feedback culture was widely recognized as essential. Establishing spaces for open dialogue—where everyone can express needs, challenges, and ideas without fear of judgment—helps strengthen team cohesion and encourage innovation. This dynamic calls for leadership based on listening, humility, and a desire to grow with others rather than impose on them.

Finally, the discussions illuminated the growing influence of younger generations on leadership models. Several speakers noted a paradigm shift similar to that seen in education : where authority was once vertical and uncontested, it is now becoming more participative, inclusive, and collaborative. This evolution does not undermine leadership legitimacy but redefines its practices. New generations expect accessible leaders who accompany rather than direct, who co-create rather than impose. They value authenticity, transparency, and the ability to rally people around a meaningful project.

All these insights converge toward a single idea : the leadership of tomorrow will be based on balancing high standards with kindness, combining clarity of vision with relational flexibility. More than ever, it relies on the ability to self-reflect, engage in dialogue with one's environment, and place human relationships at the heart of collective dynamics.





Conclusion

Insights from the Talent Synergizer 2025 reveal a significant transformation in both the definition and practice of leadership. Leadership is no longer solely associated with authority or hierarchical management—it is increasingly viewed as a relational, adaptable stance focused on the quality of interactions.

In a context shaped by evolving societal expectations, diverse individual profiles, and a growing search for meaning, the synergy between self-leadership and servant leadership emerges as a strategic lever. The leadership of tomorrow requires deep self-awareness, openness to others, and the ability to support teams through complexity.

This renewed approach promotes more horizontal management based on active listening, consistency, and co-creation. It calls on organizations to rethink roles, practices, and governance models in order to foster the emergence of leaders who bring meaning to collective action.

Further reading :

- Mercier, Jean-Yves. *Self-leadership : Les 8 Piliers pour trouver du sens*. De Boeck Supérieur, 2025.
- Blanchard, Ken, and René Broadwell. *Servant Leadership in Action : How You Can Achieve Great Relationships and Results*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2018.



Young People No Longer Want to Become Managers

The reflections on leadership transformation highlighted during the Talent Synergizer 2025 align with broader trends redefining professional aspirations, especially among younger generations. Changes in leadership practices resonate with how those under 30 perceive the role of leadership within organizations.

Unlike their predecessors, for whom reaching a management position was often seen as the pinnacle of professional success, today's young professionals adopt a more ambivalent—even critical—stance toward management roles. A recent Swiss study by recruitment firm Robert

Walters found that 30% of Generation Z professionals (born between 1997 and 2010) do not wish to pursue mid-level management positions¹. Even more striking, 78% consider such roles too stressful and insufficiently rewarding. The study highlights a marked shift in professional aspirations, favoring personal development and skills acquisition over hierarchical advancement.

A similar trend is observed elsewhere : in the UK, another Robert Walters study revealed that 52% of under-30s reject the idea of becoming managers, with 16% ruling out any team leadership roles altogether². Specialists describe this phenomenon as “conscious de-hierarchization” : a deliberate repositioning away from traditional authority models, driven not by a lack of work ethic but by a profound transformation in attitudes toward work and success.

Success is no longer seen solely through career advancement or job stability for Generation Z. Instead, work is expected to integrate into a balanced personal life project, rich in meaning and diverse experiences. In this view, younger generations do not reject leadership but seek to redefine it. Their ideal leader is not an authoritarian figure but a facilitator, a collective catalyst who initiates collaboration and co-creation.

In Germany, a 2022 survey by the network Chef : innensache found that only 29% of employees aspire to leadership roles, compared to nearly 40% a few years ago³. This disengagement is particularly strong among those under 30, who criticize traditional, rigid, non-participative management styles. Rather than shunning organizational life, they express a clear desire to actively participate in shaping visions and building collective solutions.

According to experts, this trend aligns with broader patterns of active participation seen in other areas of life, such as consumer behavior. Young people are increasingly involved in co-creating the products they consume—and they now expect the same participatory approach in organizational life. They want to contribute, dialogue, and propose, not just execute. This reversal in management dynamics demands profound cultural and practical changes from organizations, emphasizing openness, transparency, and agility.

Far from signaling disengagement, this shift shows a renewed form of engagement. Young generations do not reject leadership ; they demand to reinvent it. They envision leadership not as a status but as a relational and collective endeavor rooted in meaning and shared intelligence. These aspirations, if taken seriously, echo the conclusions of the Talent Synergizer 2025 : modern leadership must combine self-awareness, service to others, and the ability to adapt posture to context and people. In short, the new generation does not reject leadership—they are calling for its reinvention.

1) Robert Walters, 30% des professionnels de la génération Z ne veulent pas être des cadres moyens, décembre 2024.

2) Robert Walters, Conscious Unbossing : 52% of Gen-Z Professionals Don't Want to Be Middle Managers, septembre 2024.

3) Chef : innensache, Karrierezuversicht sinkt auf einen Tiefstand, avril 2022.



Uni Mail — Bd du Pont-d'Arve 40/1211 — 4 Genève