Leading the Next Generation Workforce

How workforce expectations are redefining effective leadership →



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Australia

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“This generation is different.”

That’s what everyone says.
But what if that’s not the story?
What’s really changed isn’t the people, it’s what people expect.

From their work. From their leaders. From each other. And the leaders who succeed next won’t be the ones who resist it, they’ll be the ones who understand it.



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Understanding the Shift

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Work has changed. So have expectations.

From stability to constant evolution →

- COVID
- Social media
- The economy
- Politics
- Social movements
- Artificial intelligence

Five Generations. One Workforce.

For the **first time in modern history,** five generations are expecting something different.

By 2034, nearly **80%** of the workforce will be Millennials, Gen Z, and early Gen Alpha.

These generations bring **new expectations** about work and leadership.

PODCAST: Next Gen Leadership



Boomers



Gen X



Millennials



Gen Z



Gen Alpha

Source: World Economic Forum

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Different generations.

Different, and similar, expectations.

Each generation enters the workforce with experiences shaped by technology, culture, and world events.

As a result, expectations about work, leadership, and organisational culture are evolving.

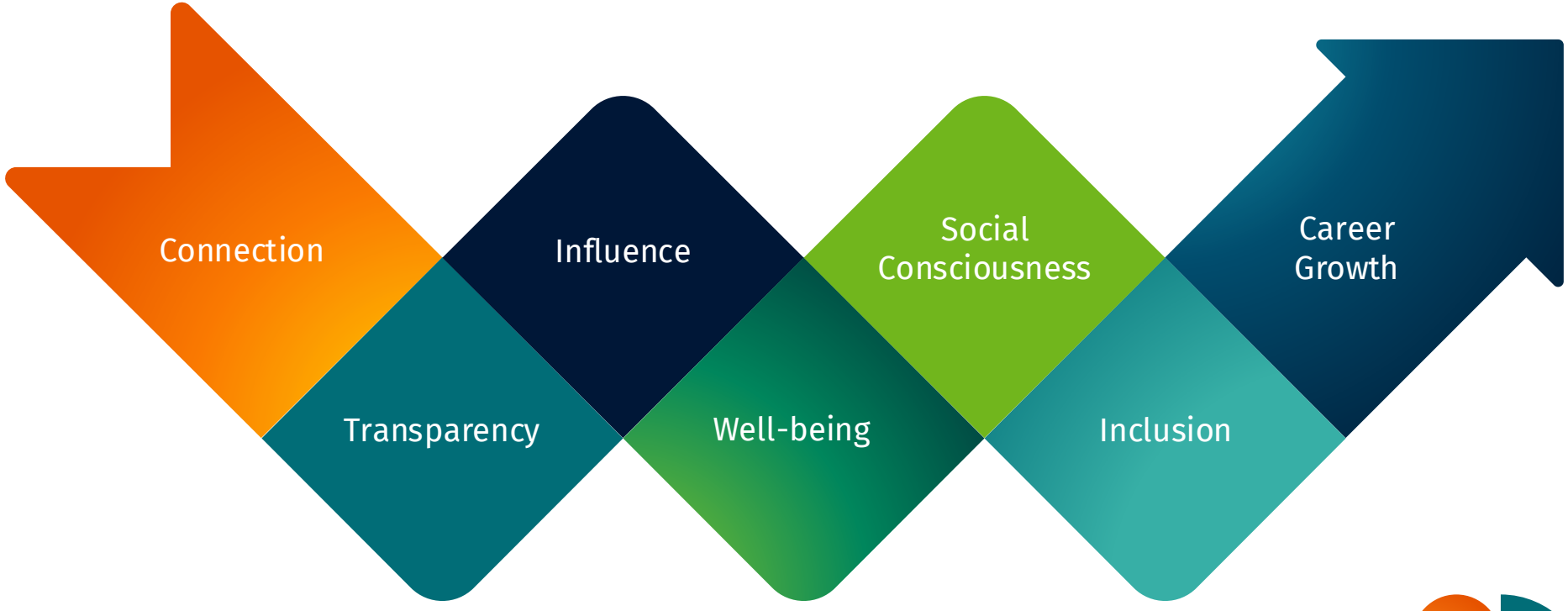
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What Today's Workforce Expects

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What Today's Workforce Expects from Leaders



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Connection

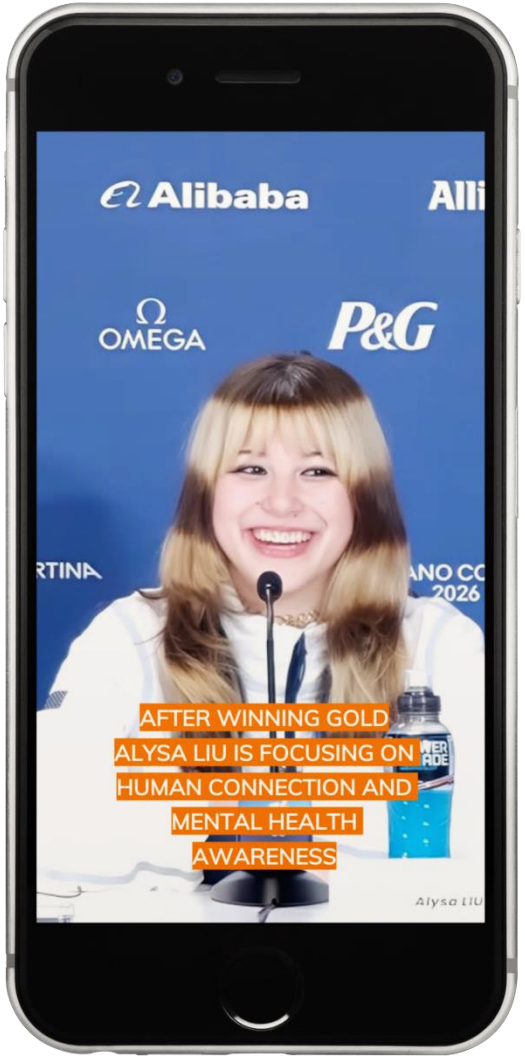
Employees Expect Real Human Connection

In a digital world, **human connection** matters more than ever.



> All I want in my life is **human connection** — and, damn, now I'm connected with a hell of a ton of people.
>
> - Alysa Liu

> The internet is completely obsessed with Alysa Liu for **all the right reasons**.



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Transparency

Workplaces Are Becoming Radically Transparent

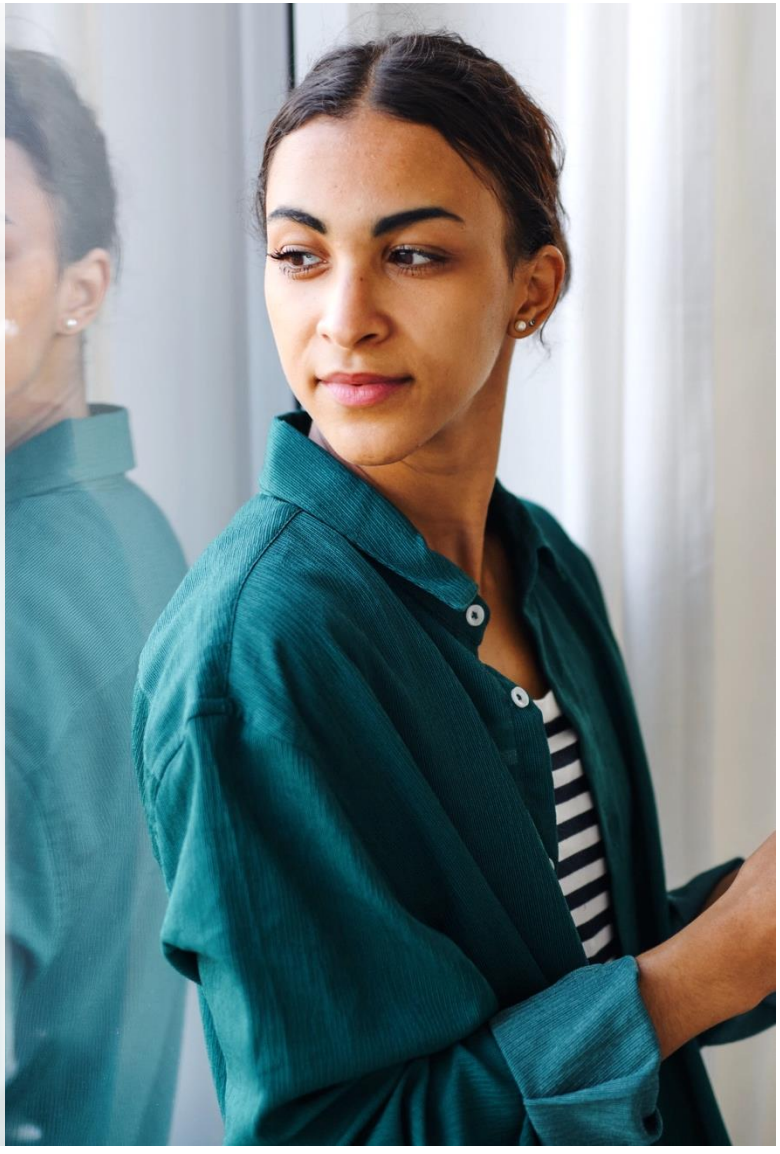
Employees **expect openness** around decisions, culture, and opportunity.

- Career
- Pay
- Values
- Diversity
- Communication
- Decisions

87%
of college students rank pay transparency as a top priority

73%
of hiring managers screen candidates' social media

77%
of candidates evaluate company culture before applying



Sources: Symplicity, Glassdoor, Resume Builder

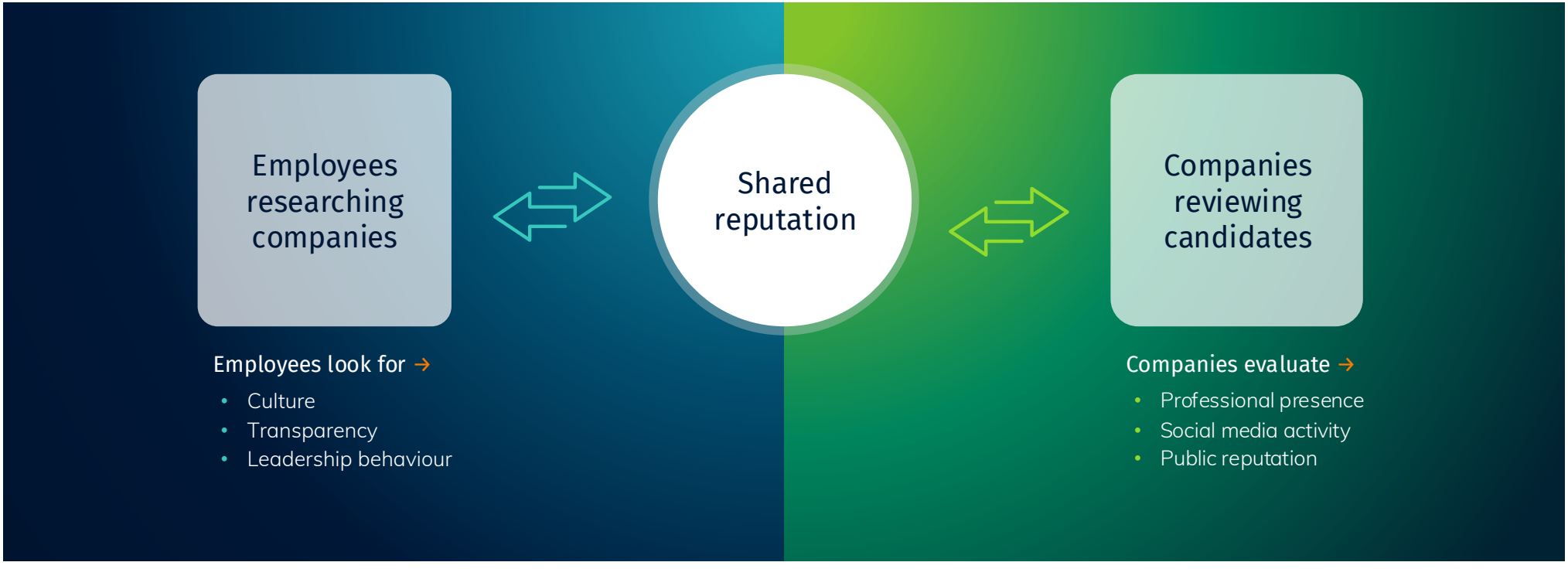
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Influence

Reputation is Shared

Online presence shapes how **employees evaluate companies** — and how **companies evaluate employees**.

> The beauty of social media is that it will point out your company's flaws; the key question is how quickly you address these flaws.
>
> - Eric Qualman



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Well-being

Mental Health is a Workplace Expectation

The pandemic reshaped how generations think about **stress, resilience, and mental well-being.**

40% Gen Z
34% Millennials
Feel stressed or anxious most of the time.



COVID shaped generations

- Isolation
- Disruption
- Stress
- Digital fatigue
- Uncertainty

What emerged after

- Healthier routines
- New skills and hobbies
- Greater openness about mental health
- Resilience and adaptability

Source: Deloitte Perspectives, October 2025

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Inclusion & Social Consciousness

Belonging is a Baseline

Gen Z grew up in the most diverse generation in U.S. history — shaping their expectations for inclusion and representation **everywhere, including work.**

What the workforce expects

- Authentic diversity and representation
- Inclusive workplace culture
- Brands aligned with social values
- Commitment to community and impact



Source: U.S. Census Bureau / Pew Research Center

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Career

Work is No Longer a Defining Identity

Employees increasingly view work as **what they do — not who they are.** Reshaping expectations around loyalty, mobility, and career paths.

Key shifts in careers

- **Portfolio careers** across roles and experiences
- **Gig work** and fractional work are common
- **Greater mobility** between jobs and companies
- Loyalty based on **mutual value** — not tenure



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What These Expectations Mean for Leaders

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A Fundamental Shift

Today's employees expect workplaces built on connection, transparency, well-being, and purpose. Leadership must intentionally create those environments.



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Forces Shaping the Next Generation of Leaders

The workplace trends we explored are **redefining what leadership requires.**

- Connection
- Transparency
- Influence
- Well-being
- Inclusion
- Career



PODCAST: Leading in the Future

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Leading in a Changing Workplace

Five Leadership Actions

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What Leaders Need to Do Now:
Five Leadership Actions

01
Build trust through transparency

02
Lead with compassion while maintaining standards

03
Integrate inclusive actions

04
Integrate technology and AI tools responsibly

05
Support evolving career paths

ARTICLE:
Leading in an AI World

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01 Build Trust Through Transparency



BLOG: Future Ready Leaders

What's always been there – Trust

What's new – Increased expectations for transparency where trust is more fragile than ever

- **Clarify** outcomes and the reasoning behind them
- **Follow through** on commitments
- **Share decisions** — and the thinking behind them
- **Communicate consistently** and close the loop
- **Acknowledge** what you don't yet know

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02 Lead With Compassion Without Lowering Standards



BLOG: One Thing Future Leaders Need

What's always been there – Goals and performance expectations

What's new – Greater focus on the person behind the performance, and faster feedback

- **Provide** timely feedback
- **Reframe accountability** as helping people succeed
- **Support employees** in protecting their well-being
- **Lead with kindness and empathy**
- **Reinforce this mindset** through actions and skills

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03 Integrate Inclusive Actions



BLOG: Leadership for an Evolving Workforce

What's always been there – A narrower definition of inclusion

What's new – Inclusion broadly defined and embedded across the organisation

- **Use** inclusive language
- **Respect** how individuals show up
- **Correct mistakes** and move forward
- **Lead with curiosity and respect**
- **Apply an inclusive mindset** in meetings and staffing decisions

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04 Integrate Technology and AI Tools Responsibly



BLOG: Leadership Advantage

What's always been there – Technology reshaping how we work

What's new – Fast-moving, transformative technology requiring discernment and accountability

- **Support** practical application
- **Establish** clear guardrails and expectations
- **Encourage** critical thinking
- **Remain** human-centred
- **Bring EI to your AI**

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05 Support Evolving Career Paths



BLOG: Leaders Act Without Certainty

What's always been there – Career development conversations that support engagement and growth

What's new – Visible, tangible support for career growth and exploration

- **Provide access** to meaningful opportunities
- **Hold** frequent career conversations
- **Support** career exploration without judgement
- **Invest** real resources in development opportunities
- **Help people connect** their work to purpose

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Leading Forward

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Leadership Then and Now | What's Shifting

	Then	Now
Trust and Transparency	**Trust assumed** • Decisions shared without context • Information controlled • Certainty expected	**Trust built through transparency** • Share thinking and tradeoffs • Communicate even when unclear • Acknowledge uncertainty
Compassion and Standards	**Performance first** • Outcomes over individual • Delayed feedback • Personal needs secondary	**Human-centred performance** • Balance empathy & accountability • Real-time ongoing feedback • Well-being supports performance
Inclusion and Belonging	**Programmatic inclusion** • Narrow definition • Treated as an initiative • Avoid mistakes	**Embedded inclusion** • Broad, everyday practice • Integrated into decisions • Learn and correct in real time
Technology and AI	**Tool for efficiency** • Focus on capability • Limited guardrails • Leader distance	**Leadership responsibility** • Intentional, purpose-driven • Ethics + judgement matter • Human-centred application
Career Growth	**Defined career paths** • Periodic conversations • Linear progression • Advice-based support	**Dynamic career support** • Visible opportunities & access • Normalise exploration • Connect work to purpose

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The workplace is changing — and leadership expectations are changing with it.



The workforce is being shaped in real time →

New generations, new workforces, new expectations – work will not go back.

The leadership playbook is being rewritten →

The bar has been raised with respect to trust, transparency, inclusion, technology and growth all at once.

What people need hasn't changed, but they expect more →

Meaning, growth, and fulfillment delivered through flexibility, transparency and support that is not performative.

Future-ready leaders create space and connect →

Preparing employees across generations to succeed.

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Watch the full webinar recording on **Rewriting the Rules: Leadership for the Next-Gen Workforce** and to learn more about all that Blanchard does to support leaders today and in the future. →

Watch the Webinar

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