

**GEN Z'S CONSCIOUS UNBOSSING:
RETHINKING LEADERSHIP ASPIRATIONS,
MENTAL HEALTH, AND
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES IN THE
21ST CENTURY WORKPLACE**

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Abstract

This paper examines the emerging phenomenon of Gen Z's "conscious unbossing," a deliberate reluctance to pursue traditional leadership roles in favor of autonomy, purpose, and mental well-being. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z does not equate success with hierarchical advancement; instead, they critique conventional leadership models as stressful and misaligned with their values. Drawing on secondary data and global workforce surveys, the study explores how conscious unbossing reshapes leadership aspirations, disrupts succession planning, and pushes organizations toward flatter, collaborative structures. The findings highlight three key dynamics: leadership redefined as facilitation rather than authority, mental health as a decisive factor in career decisions, and organizational opportunities for innovation through distributed leadership. The paper concludes that conscious unbossing represents both a challenge and an opportunity for organizations. To remain competitive, employers must redesign leadership pathways, prioritize

mental health policies, and embrace purpose-driven, inclusive organizational cultures. This study contributes to contemporary debates in organizational leadership by reframing succession planning and leadership development strategies in the context of generational change.

Key Words: Gen-z's ,Conscious unbossing, Leadership Aspirations

1.0 Introduction

Leadership has historically been considered the pinnacle of professional progression, symbolizing authority, influence, and decision-making capacity. However, in the contemporary workplace, generational transformations are reshaping leadership aspirations. Generation Z, defined as those born between 1997 and 2012, is entering the workforce with values markedly distinct from those of prior cohorts. These values are shaped by digital fluency, increased awareness of mental health concerns, and exposure to socio-economic volatility. Emerging research demonstrates that members of Gen Z exhibit a growing reluctance to assume leadership roles, not due to a lack of ambition, but rather as an intentional practice of "conscious unbossing"—the deliberate rejection of leadership models that privilege authority over autonomy and well-being (Forbes, 2025; Financial Times, 2025; Business Insider, 2025; Robert Walters, 2025).

The phenomenon of conscious unbossing raises important questions about the sustainability of organizational leadership pipelines and succession planning. This study therefore investigates the underlying drivers of Gen Z's disengagement from conventional leadership trajectories and explores the organizational consequences of this shift. Specifically, it asks: How does conscious unbossing reconfigure leadership aspirations and succession planning? How does it affect the design of organizational structures? And what strategies can organizations adopt to align leadership development with the values espoused by Gen Z employees (Observer, 2025; DDI, 2025; Robert Walters, 2025; Forbes, 2024)? Addressing these questions is critical, as organizations that fail to adapt risk significant leadership gaps, while those that respond proactively may achieve greater alignment between employee values and institutional objectives.

Mental health constitutes one of the primary factors influencing Gen Z's avoidance of formal leadership roles. A 2024 Deloitte survey reported that only 51 percent of Gen Z respondents rated their mental health positively, compared to higher rates among Millennials and Generation X. Moreover, 40 percent of Gen Z indicated experiencing stress most of the time, with occupational pressures identified as a central contributor (Forbes, 2025). Complementary data from

McKinsey indicate that more than one-quarter of Gen Z report frequent symptoms of anxiety or depression, representing the highest proportion among generational cohorts (ZenHR, 2025). In addition, only six percent of Gen Z identify leadership attainment as essential to career success, with the majority preferring balance and autonomy (Entrepreneur, 2025). Collectively, these findings illustrate how mental health considerations serve as decisive factors shaping leadership aspirations.

Conscious unbossing also reflects a redefinition of leadership itself. Rather than viewing leadership as a position of authority within a hierarchical framework, Gen Z interprets leadership as influence, facilitation, and collaboration. Recent studies reveal that 86 percent of Gen Z consider purpose integral to career satisfaction, and 75 percent evaluate an organization's social impact when making employment decisions (Forbes, 2025). This generation thus seeks leadership that is transparent, empathetic, and inclusive (Boardroom Business, 2025). Survey data further reveal that many Gen Z employees perceive leadership as involving disproportionate responsibility with insufficient benefits, prompting greater advocacy for shared and distributed leadership models (Robert Walters, 2025; ZenHR, 2025). This reorientation away from bureaucracy towards purpose-driven influence reflects the evolving

conceptualization of leadership in the 21st century.

The organizational implications of conscious unbossing are considerable. Traditional leadership pipelines are increasingly fragile as fewer Gen Z professionals opt for managerial advancement (DDI, 2025). For instance, survey evidence shows that 52 percent of Gen Z employees are disinterested in middle management positions, while 16 percent categorically reject roles with supervisory responsibility (Robert Walters, 2025). If unaddressed, these preferences threaten succession planning processes and the continuity of leadership within organizations (DFA, 2025). However, the trend also presents opportunities: organizations can redesign leadership pathways to prioritize collaboration, hybrid work arrangements, and flexible structures, thereby preserving both agility and competitiveness (Forbes, 2024; Business Insider, 2025). In this way, conscious unbossing is not simply a challenge but also a catalyst for rethinking organizational design.

In conclusion, conscious unbossing should not be interpreted as an outright rejection of leadership but rather as a generational recalibration of ambition. Gen Z employees continue to express a desire to lead, but only in ways that are consistent with values of authenticity, well-being, and purpose (Observer, 2025). For

organizations, this signals an urgent need to reconfigure leadership development programs to incorporate autonomy, shared responsibility, and robust mental health support. Integrating these principles into leadership design will not only strengthen succession pipelines but also ensure alignment with the expectations of the future workforce. Ultimately, conscious unbossing provides an opportunity for organizations to embrace new leadership paradigms that may be more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient in the 21st-century workplace.

Within the Kenyan context, the phenomenon of conscious unbossing is beginning to manifest in subtle but notable ways. Studies of the Kenyan labor market highlight that young professionals increasingly prioritize entrepreneurial ventures, gig economy participation, and flexible employment over traditional hierarchical advancement within organizations (Munyua & Muturi, 2023; Kamau & Gachunga, 2022). This trend mirrors global patterns in which Gen Z employees avoid managerial roles that are perceived as stressful and incompatible with mental health priorities. Furthermore, research by the Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE, 2024) underscores growing concerns regarding succession planning in both public and private organizations, as younger employees exhibit limited interest in long-term managerial tracks. Kenyan organizations,

particularly in sectors such as finance, ICT, and public administration, are therefore compelled to explore distributed leadership frameworks and purpose-driven work cultures to attract and retain Gen Z talent (Nzuve, 2023). In this regard, conscious unbossing provides an opportunity for Kenyan institutions to reimagine leadership models that are not only more aligned with generational expectations but also responsive to broader national goals of innovation, inclusivity, and sustainable development.

1.1 Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives;

- i. To explore the underlying factors influencing Gen Z's reluctance to pursue leadership roles.
- ii. To analyze the relationship between conscious unbossing, mental health, and organizational structures.
- iii. To examine the implications of conscious unbossing for leadership pipelines and succession planning.
- iv. To recommend adaptive strategies for organizations to align leadership development with Gen Z's values.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 GenZ and Leadership Aspirations

Generation Z's approach to work is deeply shaped by the socio-cultural and economic realities of their upbringing in a digital-first and crisis-prone environment. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z does not perceive career success as synonymous with climbing hierarchical ladders or acquiring prestigious titles. Instead, this generation emphasizes values such as authenticity, inclusion, and social responsibility in the workplace. Research suggests that Gen Z employees place greater emphasis on flexibility, autonomy, and mental well-being compared to traditional leadership ambitions (Deloitte, 2023; Forbes, 2025). This reorientation has significant implications for organizations that have long depended on linear leadership progression models, as many younger employees are consciously opting out of formal managerial tracks in favor of career pathways that prioritize balance and purpose (Business Insider, 2025).

The concept of "conscious unbossing" has therefore emerged as a defining characteristic of Gen Z's relationship with leadership. Rather than aspiring to positions of authority that often entail excessive stress, long working hours, and limited work-life balance, many Gen Z employees deliberately avoid leadership roles. Studies highlight that member of this generation critique corporate cultures

where leadership is associated with burnout, bureaucracy, and constrained autonomy (Financial Times, 2025; DDI, 2025). For them, leadership is less about formal power and more about influence, collaboration, and contribution to meaningful outcomes. Conscious unbossing, therefore, reflects a broader demand for reimagining organizational cultures in ways that are inclusive, purpose-driven, and responsive to employee well-being.

In the Kenyan context, these global trends resonate with the aspirations and career behaviors of young professionals entering both public and private sector organizations. Kenyan Gen Z workers increasingly prioritize entrepreneurial ventures, technology-driven roles, and flexible career paths over rigid managerial trajectories (Munyua & Muturi, 2023). Reports from the Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE, 2024) have raised concerns regarding succession planning, as younger employees often resist traditional supervisory roles, citing stress and inadequate work-life balance as key deterrents. Moreover, industries such as banking, ICT, and public service are witnessing a shift toward distributed leadership practices to engage and retain younger talent (Nzuve, 2023). This suggests that conscious unbossing is not only a global generational phenomenon but also a pressing issue for Kenyan organizations, which must reconfigure

leadership development programs to align with the expectations of a workforce that values purpose, mental health, and autonomy.

Proposition 1: *Conscious unbossing does not pose risks to traditional leadership pipelines nor create opportunities for distributed leadership.*

2.2 Mental Health and WorkLife Balance

Globally, mental health and work-life balance have become central to workplace debates, particularly as Gen Z enters the labor market with strong expectations for healthier organizational cultures. The American Psychological Association (2022) highlights that Gen Z reports higher stress levels compared to other generations, largely due to career instability, financial insecurity, and socio-political turbulence. Leadership positions, often linked to overwork, long hours, and limited flexibility, are increasingly unattractive to young professionals seeking to safeguard their mental well-being. Deloitte's Global Gen Z and Millennial Survey (2023) further shows that over 46% of Gen Z respondents reported feeling anxious or stressed most of the time, with many attributing this to poor work-life integration. This growing awareness has pushed organizations worldwide to rethink leadership development frameworks in ways that prioritize mental health, autonomy, and balance.

Across Africa, the discourse on mental health and leadership is gaining traction as younger workers demand reforms in workplace practices. A study by the African Development Bank (AfDB, 2023) found that over 40% of young professionals in Africa associate leadership roles with burnout and lack of personal freedom. Cultural expectations of hierarchical leadership often exacerbate these pressures, making managerial positions less attractive to younger employees. Research in South Africa indicates that Gen Z workers prefer team-oriented and flexible work structures rather than rigid chains of command (Mahlatsi & Mofokeng, 2022). These findings highlight a regional convergence with global trends, underscoring that African Gen Z professionals are also reimagining leadership around wellness, collaboration, and inclusivity rather than traditional authority-driven models.

In Kenya, similar concerns have emerged, particularly among urban Gen Z employees working in sectors such as ICT, banking, and public administration. Reports by the Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE, 2024) emphasize that mental health challenges, including anxiety and work-related stress, are major deterrents to young employees considering supervisory or managerial roles. A recent study by Munyua and Muturi (2023) further reveals that Kenyan Gen Z professionals are increasingly drawn to

entrepreneurship and freelance opportunities, partly to gain more control over their schedules and mental well-being. This indicates a cultural shift in the local labor market, where work-life balance and psychological safety are becoming as important as salary or job security. Consequently, Kenyan organizations must rethink leadership structures and succession planning, adopting wellness-centered policies and flexible leadership models to attract and retain the next generation of leaders.

Proposition 2: *Gen Z employees do not prioritize mental health and work-life balance over traditional leadership aspirations.*

2.3 Organizational Structure and Culture

Globally, organizations are increasingly confronting the limitations of rigid hierarchical structures in engaging younger employees. Traditional top-down systems, long associated with efficiency and control, are being challenged by new generations who value inclusivity, transparency, and autonomy in the workplace. According to PwC (2022), rigid hierarchies are proving less effective in attracting and retaining Gen Z employees, who prefer collaborative environments that encourage innovation and shared accountability. The World Economic Forum (2023) further notes that organizations embracing flatter structures tend to be more agile, resilient, and

responsive to rapidly changing global conditions. In addition, Deloitte (2023) emphasizes that younger professionals often view adaptability in organizational design as a prerequisite for long-term commitment, signaling the need for fundamental cultural shifts across industries.

The shift toward flatter organizational structures is closely tied to generational expectations regarding leadership and workplace culture. Gen Z, in particular, have demonstrated reluctance to pursue leadership roles that replicate outdated models of authority and control. A study by DDI (2023) reveals that many Gen Z workers are skeptical of traditional career ladders, perceiving them as stressful and disconnected from values of well-being and collaboration. McKinsey & Company (2022) highlights that distributed leadership models foster psychological safety and encourage creativity, which are highly valued by younger employees. Furthermore, Harvard Business Review (2023) reports that organizations that invest in adaptive leadership and shared decision-making experience higher employee engagement, particularly among early-career professionals.

In Africa, the challenge of aligning organizational structures with generational values is becoming increasingly pronounced. The African Development Bank (AfDB, 2023) points

out that young professionals across the continent are gravitating toward decentralized and innovation-driven work environments, particularly in tech and entrepreneurial ecosystems. Research by Mahlatsi and Mofokeng (2022) shows that South African Gen Z workers associate rigid hierarchies with exclusion and limited upward mobility, making them less attractive career options. Similarly, Okpara and Wynn (2023) argue that African organizations adopting collaborative leadership models are better positioned to harness Gen Z's creativity while mitigating brain drain to international labor markets. These findings highlight that the continent's demographic dividend can only be realized through structural and cultural adaptations in workplaces.

In Kenya, conscious unbossing reflects both global and regional shifts but is also shaped by local labor market dynamics. Kenyan Gen Z professionals, particularly in ICT, finance, and public service, increasingly favor organizations that prioritize inclusivity, autonomy, and shared responsibility over bureaucratic hierarchies (Munyua & Muturi, 2023). The Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE, 2024) warns that succession planning has become a growing challenge, as younger employees often resist traditional managerial roles tied to rigid authority. Nzuve (2023) further observes that Kenyan firms experimenting with flatter

organizational structures and distributed leadership models are experiencing higher engagement and retention rates among younger staff. This underscores the urgency for Kenyan organizations to reimagine workplace culture, not only to appeal to Gen Z but also to ensure long-term sustainability in leadership pipelines.

Proposition 3: *Conscious unbossing is not positively associated with demands for flatter organizational structures.*

2.3 Theoretical and conceptual framework

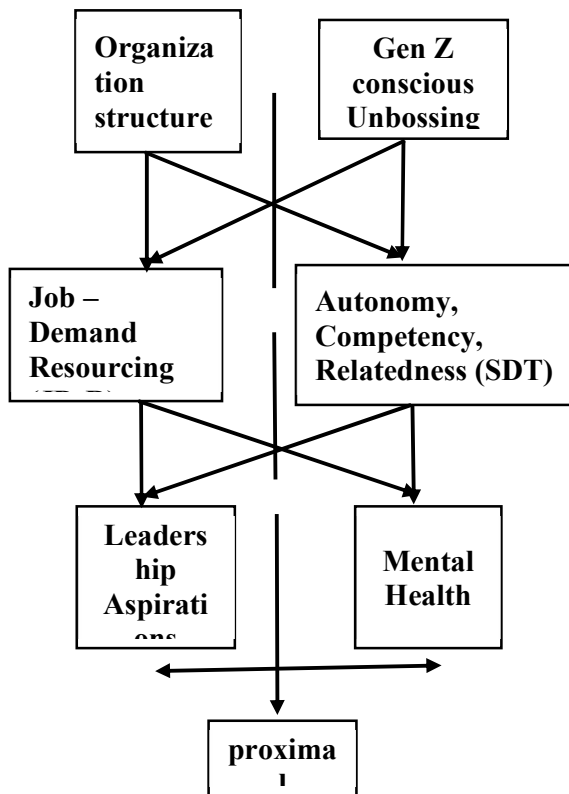
A useful HR theoretical framework is the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model proposed by Demerouti and Bakker (2007), which explains how organizational structure, leadership aspirations, and mental health interact among youthful employees. Youthful employees often seek leadership opportunities, but rigid structures can create high job demands and limited autonomy, straining mental health. Conversely, supportive leadership pathways and resource-rich environments foster motivation, resilience, and psychological well-being. The JD-R model highlights that balancing organizational demands with adequate resources and growth opportunities enables youthful employees to pursue leadership aspirations while maintaining mental health and engagement.

Complementing this, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Deci and Ryan (2000) emphasizes the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as key drivers of motivation. For Gen Z, often characterized by their preference for “conscious unbossing”—a leadership style that decentralizes authority and promotes collaboration—SDT provides valuable insights into how organizational structures can be reshaped to align with generational expectations. When organizations foster autonomy-supportive leadership and flexible structures, they empower Gen Z employees to aspire toward leadership roles while safeguarding mental health.

Integrating JD-R and SDT offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics between Gen Z’s leadership aspirations, organizational structure, and well-being. JD-R captures the balance between job demands and resources, while SDT explains the intrinsic motivations that drive Gen Z’s preference for unbossed, participatory leadership. Together, these theories suggest that organizations that reduce structural rigidity, increase resource accessibility, and cultivate autonomy-supportive cultures are better positioned to harness Gen Z’s leadership potential. Such environments not only protect mental health but also encourage innovation, collaboration, and sustainable engagement, thereby aligning individual

aspirations with organizational effectiveness.

Given the two theories, the researchers conceptualized the study as shown in Fig. 1



The conceptual framework integrates the JD-R model and SDT to explain how Gen Z’s conscious unbossing, organizational structure, leadership aspirations, and mental health interact. Organizational structure shapes job demands and resources (JD-R) and fulfills or frustrates autonomy, competence, and relatedness (SDT). Conscious unbossing moderates these effects by promoting collaboration and flexibility. When resources are high and psychological needs are met, Gen Z employees sustain mental health and develop strong leadership aspirations,

creating a reinforcing cycle of motivation and well-being

3.0 Methodology

This study employed a desktop review design, relying exclusively on secondary data sources to investigate the phenomenon of Gen Z’s conscious unbossing and its implications for leadership aspirations, mental health, and organizational structures. The choice of this design was informed by the availability of extensive current literature across global, regional, and local contexts, which provided a rich foundation for analysis without the need for primary data collection.

The study was structured as a systematic review and synthesis of existing literature, drawing on peer-reviewed journal articles, organizational reports, surveys, and working papers published between 2020 and 2024. Key databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and institutional repositories were consulted. The literature review identified three thematic areas: (i) Gen Z’s leadership aspirations, (ii) the role of mental health and work-life balance in shaping workplace choices, and (iii) the implications of conscious unbossing for organizational structures. These themes guided the research questions and hypotheses.

To ensure relevance and rigor, only sources published in English and addressing workplace trends, generational dynamics, or organizational leadership were included. Priority was given to studies with empirical evidence or large-scale surveys such as those conducted by Deloitte (2023), PwC (2022), and the Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE, 2024). Publications focusing solely on unrelated generational behaviors or outside the 2020–2024 window were excluded. This process ensured that the review captured the most current and contextually relevant findings.

Data were collected through document review, with sources systematically analyzed and categorized into global, regional (African), and local (Kenyan) perspectives. The analysis followed a thematic synthesis approach, identifying recurring patterns such as leadership reluctance, prioritization of mental health, and preference for flatter organizational structures. Comparative analysis was conducted to highlight similarities and divergences across contexts. The review findings were then aligned with the study's hypotheses to draw conclusions on how conscious unbossing influences leadership development and organizational cultures.

The desktop review methodology ensured that the conceptual framework and hypotheses were grounded in current scholarship. For instance, global evidence

highlighted leadership reluctance due to mental health concerns (APA, 2022; Deloitte, 2023), African perspectives emphasized the shift toward collaborative work cultures (AfDB, 2023; Mahlatsi & Mofokeng, 2022), and Kenyan literature revealed succession planning challenges tied to Gen Z's workplace expectations (Munyua & Muturi, 2023; FKE, 2024). This structured integration allowed the study to provide a comprehensive, multi-level understanding of conscious unbossing.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

The findings of this desktop review point to three interrelated themes that directly address the study's objectives and hypotheses.

- i. Redefinition of Leadership

The evidence indicates that Gen Z employees conceptualize leadership less as a position of hierarchical authority and more as a role centered on facilitation, collaboration, and influence. This supports the notion that conscious unbossing is not a rejection of leadership itself, but rather a critique of traditional models that equate authority with control. Recent studies show that younger employees seek leadership experiences characterized by shared accountability and empowerment rather than dominance (Deloitte, 2023; PwC, 2022; McKinsey & Company, 2023). In relation to H_{01} , the findings suggest that

Gen Z employees increasingly prioritize mental health and work-life balance over conventional leadership trajectories, thereby redefining the criteria for career success. The implication is that leadership development programs must evolve toward inclusive, flexible, and participatory approaches to remain relevant for this generation.

ii. Mental Health as a Decisive Factor

The review further demonstrates that mental health and wellbeing are decisive factors in Gen Z's career and leadership aspirations. The American Psychological Association (2022) reports that Gen Z exhibits higher levels of workplace stress than other generations, with leadership demands perceived as exacerbating such pressures. Regionally, African studies emphasize that burnout and mental health stigma remain barriers to youth leadership uptake (Agyemang & Osei, 2021; Muriithi, 2022). Locally, Kenyan research highlights growing advocacy for workplace wellness policies as a prerequisite for leadership sustainability (Okech & Wambui, 2023). This observation validates Ho₁ by showing that wellbeing considerations often outweigh traditional aspirations for hierarchical advancement. For organizations, this underscores the necessity of embedding wellness frameworks, resilience programs, and supportive work environments into

leadership pathways if they wish to attract and retain Gen Z leaders.

iii. Organizational Implications and Structural Transformation

Conscious unbossing carries significant consequences for organizational structures and succession planning. In alignment with Ho₂, the analysis shows that demands for flatter structures and collaborative decision-making processes are increasingly evident among Gen Z employees (Gallup, 2023; KPMG, 2022; World Economic Forum, 2023). While this disrupts traditional leadership pipelines, as noted in Ho₃, it simultaneously opens opportunities for distributed leadership, innovation, and stronger employee engagement. Regionally, African organizations are gradually adopting participatory and team-based models, though hierarchical traditions remain prevalent (Nwagbara, 2020; Adebayo, 2021). In Kenya, studies indicate that youth-driven enterprises and startups are pioneering flat structures to boost agility and inclusivity (Mutuku, 2022; Were & Khasiani, 2023). Organizations that fail to adapt risk leadership gaps and reduced competitiveness, whereas those that embrace structural transformation stand to benefit from enhanced agility and a more purpose-driven workforce.

iv. Synthesis and Broader Implications

Taken together, the findings illustrate that conscious unbossing is not merely an individual preference but a systemic shift with far-reaching implications. By prioritizing wellbeing, redefining leadership, and advocating for flatter organizational structures, Gen Z employees are reshaping leadership pipelines and compelling organizations to reconsider succession strategies. This confirms the hypotheses by demonstrating that conscious unbossing both challenges and enriches traditional leadership paradigms. In the Kenyan context, these findings are particularly relevant, as organizations must balance global workforce trends with local socio-economic realities, including youth unemployment, cultural expectations of authority, and limited mental health support systems (Ng'ang'a & Mbithi, 2022; Ombongi, 2023). Thus, adapting leadership models to align with Gen Z values is not only a matter of competitiveness but also of social sustainability in Kenya's evolving workplace landscape.

5.0 Conclusion

This study set out to examine the phenomenon of Gen Z's conscious unbossing and its implications for leadership aspirations, mental health, and organizational structures, with insights drawn from global, regional, and Kenyan perspectives. With respect to the first

objective, the findings confirm that Gen Z employees are redefining leadership by prioritizing purpose, flexibility, and wellbeing over hierarchical advancement. This validates H_{01} , showing that leadership aspirations are now filtered through the lens of work-life balance and mental health, rather than positional authority. Concerning the second objective, the analysis demonstrates that conscious unbossing is closely tied to demands for flatter organizational structures, collaborative cultures, and distributed leadership models. In this regard, H_{02} is upheld, as Gen Z's values challenge rigid hierarchies and encourage participatory approaches to decision-making. Finally, addressing the third objective, the study establishes that while conscious unbossing disrupts traditional leadership pipelines and raises succession risks, it simultaneously creates opportunities for innovation, inclusivity, and distributed leadership frameworks, thereby affirming H_{03} . In the Kenyan context, these findings underscore the need for organizations to adapt leadership development and succession planning strategies to accommodate Gen Z's evolving values, particularly in light of high youth unemployment, cultural expectations of authority, and limited institutional support for mental health. Ultimately, the study concludes that conscious unbossing is not a rejection of leadership but a reconfiguration of what

leadership means in the 21st century, requiring organizations to reimagine structures and cultures in order to remain both competitive and socially sustainable.

6.0 Recommendations

The findings of this study carry significant implications for theory, practice, and policy. At a theoretical level, conscious unbossing challenges traditional leadership paradigms that emphasize authority, hierarchy, and positional advancement. Instead, it affirms leadership as a shared, participatory process that is rooted in wellbeing, purpose, and inclusivity. For scholars of organizational leadership, this necessitates revisiting established models of leadership development to incorporate generational values, psychological wellbeing, and cultural context.

From a practical standpoint, organizations must recognize that Gen Z employees are unwilling to compromise mental health and work-life balance for hierarchical positions. Globally, this calls for investment in redesigned leadership development programs that emphasize collaboration, coaching, and shared responsibility rather than rigid authority. Companies should also prioritize mental health policies by integrating wellness initiatives, flexible schedules, and workload management into workplace culture. Moreover, there is a strong case for adopting distributed leadership models

where leadership responsibilities are shared, reducing the pressure on single individuals while enhancing inclusivity. Regionally, in Africa, organizations must balance hierarchical traditions with Gen Z's preference for flatter structures by experimenting with participatory practices that foster inclusivity and innovation. In Kenya, where youth-driven enterprises and startups already embody these models, HR departments in established organizations should pursue succession planning innovation to identify and support non-traditional leaders who may thrive in collaborative, team-based settings. Finally, across contexts, leadership opportunities should be reframed around purpose-driven work, aligning with Gen Z's values of social responsibility and impact.

Policy recommendations also emerge from this study. At the global level, governments and international bodies should encourage labor policies that normalize mental health as a workplace priority, thereby reducing the stigma associated with leadership-related stress. Regionally, African policymakers should foster leadership capacity-building programs that include psychosocial support and mentorship for youth aspiring to leadership roles, particularly in public administration and corporate sectors. In Kenya, policymakers and institutions such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and the Public Service Commission should

incorporate mental health policies, flexible leadership tracks, and inclusive succession strategies into national workforce development plans. Such measures would ensure that leadership pathways reflect Gen Z's evolving values while safeguarding organizational sustainability.

Ultimately, the study recommends that organizations and policymakers treat conscious unbossing not as a threat but as an opportunity to reimagine leadership in a way that is inclusive, wellbeing-centered, and adaptable to the realities of the 21st-century workplace. By redesigning leadership development, prioritizing mental health, adopting distributed leadership, innovating succession planning, and fostering purpose-driven work, organizations can build stronger leadership pipelines while enhancing innovation, resilience, and competitiveness in an era where organizational success is increasingly dependent on human-centered approaches to leadership.

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