

# Optimization of leadership training system in Generation Z-dominated workplace: A case study of Bilibili

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**Abstract.** Generation Z employees have brought plenty of changes into workplace. In leadership training programs, they have different needs, expectations and preference compared with previous generations. This study analyzed current leadership training practices in Bilibili based on published information and combined with Situational Leadership Model, helping the corporation improve the existing system from various aspects. In current leadership training system, Bilibili concentrated on enhancing professional expertise, management skills and leadership capabilities for managers at different position levels, with less personalized content and few continuous assessments. To improve the entire training system, personalization, comprehensive evaluations and innovation should be taken into consideration. Based on Situational Leadership Model, leadership styles are adaptable, requiring managers to master multiple leadership skills. This study provides insights and suggestions on optimization of leadership training system to align with VUCA world and diverse leadership situations, according to characteristics, personal interests and goals of Generation Z employees.

**Keywords:** Generation Z, leadership training system, professional expertise, management skills, leadership capabilities

## 1. Introduction

As Generation Z employees have gradually become the main workforce and gained more influence in the workplace, companies are facing new challenges in human resource management. As an integral part of human resource management, leadership development is important for enterprises in future competitions. Different from previous generations, Generation Z has distinct personality traits (TIDHAR, 2022). They emphasize personal development, pursue rapid personal growth, value emotional support, and seek ongoing feedback on a daily basis. A survey conducted by Social Survey Center of China Youth Daily in collaboration with Wenjuan.com reveals that post-00s respondents primarily consider factors such as salary and benefits (73.5%), industry prospects (61.1%), personal growth opportunities (58.8%), alignment with personal interests (53.9%) during job-seeking (as cited in Chen & Guo, 2024). To better meet the changing needs and expectations of Generation Z employees, specifically managers, in terms of leadership skills, existing leadership training systems in companies need to be optimized and improved from various aspects to enhance the effectiveness of leadership training programs and work performance of managers in leadership. By far, research on leadership training mainly focuses on some traditional industries, such as the education sector, with less emphasis on younger workplace of Generation Z and Internet-related or other rising industries.

This article conducts a qualitative study based on the existing leadership training systems in Bilibili. As a leading brand among young generations in China, over 90% of its employees are under the age of 35, with the average age of all employees being around 27 years old in recent years, which can be described as Gen Z-dominated workplace (Bilibili, 2024). The characteristics of Generation Z, combined with fast-paced changing in the VUCA world, present new demands and challenges on its current leadership training systems. To provide personalized support in professional and leadership training for employees at each level, Bilibili has been always upgrading their training systems to cultivate more out-standing talents to ensure the fast growth of the enterprise.

The purpose of this article is to analyze its existing leadership training systems with regard to its training content and formats based on public information, finding problems and challenges Bilibili is facing and proposes optimization suggestions according to Situational Leadership Model to better align with Gen Z's needs and perform in future workplace.

## **2. Overview of Bilibili and its current leadership training system**

### **2.1. Bilibili**

Bilibili, known as the most popular video website among young generations in China, provides an engaging platform where users and content creators discover and communicate in diverse shared interests, including lifestyle, anime, games, entertainment, technology and knowledge. It also offers a diverse range of products and services, from mobile games, live events, advertising to IP derivative and others.

By the end of 2023, Bilibili (2024) had 8,801 employees in total and 93% of the number are Generation Z+, or Gen Z+ (employee under the age of 35). From functional perspective, 43% of employees worked in product and technology positions and 33% of them worked in content audit positions respectively while the number of management, sales, finance and administration positions is only 5% combined

### **2.2. Current leadership training system in Bilibili**

Regarding the promotion and development systems, Bilibili (2021) set up a dual development path for employees, M-Channel for managers and P-Channel for professionals. Employees can apply to switch to another path based on their personal goals once the promotion process starts and they are proved qualified accordingly. Additionally, Bilibili provides promoted employees with related online training courses.

Bilibili (2021) launched an online learning platform in 2020, which was B-learning. Employees can access to various courses online, including leadership training, by watching live streaming or recorded videos, online tutorials and more.

In 2023, Bilibili (2024) offered four different programs on B-learning platform, focusing on developing leadership skills, namely Leading UP, Keeping UP, UP Plan and Ready UP and each was targeted on managers at a separate level. Leading UP was mainly for senior executives to further develop leadership capabilities. Keeping UP was a training and development program focused on middle-level managers' development. UP Plan was open to frontline managers from various functional departments and helped them to improve leadership and results-oriented skills, which was conducted four sessions in total over the year. This program initially started in 2022, aiming to help talented employees equipped with management skills and eventually grow into team leaders or managers. Ready UP was design for employees who demonstrate aspiration and potential of being a manager. During the year of 2023, average training hours per employee in Bilibili was 32 hours. At the same time, only 73% of middle-level managers attended in relevant programs while 100% of senior managers were trained (Bilibili, 2024).

## **3. Challenges and problems in current leadership training system**

In a very youthful workplace like Bilibili, with the majority of employees belonging to Generation Z, or Gen Z, expectations of leadership are different from what previous generations have, due to their unique characteristics as they grew up in a digital world (TIDHAR, 2022). These changes have brought challenges to current workplace and its training systems.

### **3.1. Less participation and low level of personalization of training system**

According to Bilibili's reports, from 2020 to 2022, most leadership training programs were available to some specific departments. For instance, during 2021 and 2022, Pathfinder Program was centered around managers from OGV (Occupationally Generated Video) department only while Curvature Program was designed for managers in supporting, content and platform departments, excluding managers in product and technology and other departments. Bilibili used to provide two training programs for tech department and content audit department respectively, focusing on related management capabilities according to their own business in 2021, since employees in these

departments accounted for over three quarters combined. Over the past three years, the total engagement of middle-level managers in relevant training programs declined from 80% to 72%, much less than the figures for general staff and senior managers.

Despite the decreasing attendance of middle-level managers in 2023, Bilibili added new leadership training programs. However, those programs were based on managers' level rather than business sectors they were in. Considering needs of leadership in different departments may emphasize different aspects, current programs may be not well-adapted to the needs. Meanwhile, most programs were conducted on the B-learning platform via live-streaming or online tutorials, lacking personalized both assessments and training content and this may be another challenge to the existing system once there is a wide range of capabilities among the participants. Training content that based on fixed courses or standardized needs could be beneficial for part of participants, but it may be too simple or too complicated for others. Consequently, managers might be unable to effectively enhance their relevant management skills and waste time and energy (Qiu, 2025).

### **3.2. Different training needs of generation Z**

Previous training courses gave priorities to improvement of professional expertise and management skills for higher productivity of organizations. Apart from various needs of different business sectors, Gen Z generally have different expectations and needs of leadership training (Maszewski, 2016).

#### **3.2.1. Innovative training techniques and forms**

Growing up in a dynamic and fast-changing world, Gen Z are more familiar with digital devices and virtual technologies than previous generations. They prefer more creative and innovative forms of training. However, over the past few years, training forms did not evolve as much as expected. Although some new methods of training had been adopted, both online and offline lectures were still the most frequent forms in Bilibili's current systems. Interactivity is highly valued by Gen Z while lectures tend to be a one-way transmission of knowledge that discourages their self-motivation and passion for learning. As a matter of fact, role-playing, seminars and other methods of training have been proved to be more effective and targeted compared with basic lectures (Wang, 2018). In general, lectures may not be optimal methods of leadership training in terms of effectiveness.

#### **3.2.2. Ongoing feedback**

In Tidhar's (2024) and Maszewski's (2016) studies, they both mentioned that Gen Z viewed feedback as an important issue in training sessions. Unlike regular written feedback, Gen Z pay more attention to immediate feedback in various formats. Formats and frequency are equally significant. However, in existing systems in Bilibili, feedback and assessment systems mainly aligned with target-oriented performance management model and these biannual reviews were apparently far below the frequency of what Gen Z employees had expected.

#### **3.2.3. Personal development**

In iResearch's report (2022), personal development is a top consideration during the job-seeking process of college graduates. Different from previous generations, Tidhar (2024) found that Gen Z more actively pursue personal development, and they are more intrinsically motivated. Since personal interests have become the top priority and current training programs are results-oriented from organizational perspective, attaching personal goals to organizational aims is challenging, and this issue should be taken into consideration in leadership training seriously. Meanwhile, current lecture-based training approaches and lacking more personalized content might not align with employees' personal goals.

### **3.3. Lack of effective feedback of leadership training courses**

Post-training evaluations and feedback are a vital part of improving the quality and effectiveness of training and can reduce its costs (Wang, 2018). Sultana and Shrivastava (2024) also indicated that

the most effective approaches to evaluating the success of training programs involved gathering feedback from participants immediately after training and assessing whether expected objectives has been reached. Currently in most cases, only gathering feedback after training are obviously not supportive enough for evaluation of training programs. For businesses to enhance the quality of their training programs, it is fundamental to conduct thorough evaluations after each session and constantly adjust the training content based on feedback received.

## **4. Optimization of leadership training system based on situational leadership model**

### **4.1. Situational leadership model**

Since in real workplace, there is no single leadership style which is suitable for diverse types of working situation, leaders are required to adapt and optimize their leadership style accordingly (Hersey & Blanchard, 1997). A Situational Leadership Model, developed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard in 1969, aims to help managers or leaders assess their actual settings and adapt their leading behaviors (Vidyakala, 2020). Hersey (1997) asserts that this applications-oriented model focuses on maximizing leadership effectiveness by aligning one's leadership behaviors—specifically, the actions taken to influence others—with the needs of the individuals or groups being led. This approach emphasizes the importance of adjusting the balance between directive behaviors (providing clear guidance and structure) and supportive behaviors (offering encouragement and emotional support) based on the development level of team members. There are two key factors in assessment of development level of each team member, competence and commitment (When one size doesn't fit all, situational leadership is your ticket to success, 2025). Competence infers to individual abilities and relevant skills to undertake tasks, and commitment shows individual motivation, confidence and willingness of improvement. According to these two factors, development level of team members can be classified into four stages, namely D1 (high commitment but low competence), D2 (some competence and low commitment), D3 (high competence but lower commitment) and D4 (high competence and high commitment) (When one size doesn't fit all, situational leadership is your ticket to success, 2025). Therefore, after evaluation of development level, managers or leaders can adjust their leadership behaviors to match different situations in order to enhance effectiveness

### **4.2. Optimization of assessment systems**

For the sake of optimal effectiveness and quality of training programs and advanced improvement of trainees' future performance, evaluations should involve at least two aspects, self-assessments of employees and ongoing feedback after training.

#### **4.2.1. From managers' perspective**

Before leadership training program starts, self-assessments conducted by general-employees and managers in related departments can help managers understand the current development stage of their teams, enabling them to more effectively learn relevant skills or methods within training programs to address different situations in workplace. According to Situational Leadership Model, shifts of development levels are inevitable due to various types of tasks. Thus, adaptability, as an essential quality, places higher demands on managers, who often need to master a diverse range of management skills. With thorough understandings of current situations and clear goals of learning, managers can effectively concentrate on upcoming training programs. After training, continuous assessments and feedback on leadership performance are supportive of personal development for managers from Generation Z.

#### **4.2.2. From organizational perspective**

Extensive evaluations can help organizations understand the exact training needs of their employees, particularly managers, thereby enabling the development of more tailored content of

leadership training programs. As what Sultana and Shrivastava (2024) have found, immediate evaluations after training and assessment on whether the pre-set objectives of leadership training are equally crucial to evaluations of entire efficacy of training programs. Bilibili need to focus more on assessment practices, ongoing feedback and refining the training program accordingly, to provide managers or leaders with professional support and more personalized training content.

### **4.3. Optimization of leadership training system**

Based on characteristics of Situational Leadership Models, balance of supportive or directive behaviors of leadership are not static (Vidyakala, 2020). To adapt different leadership styles, managers are required to master diverse capabilities of decision-making, coaching, interpersonal communicating, delegating and more. Therefore, leadership training programs need to provide more training sections to satisfy the advanced needs.

#### **4.3.1. A more comprehensive training system**

Considering rapid changes in the VUCA world, to maintain flexibility and deal with uncertainty, the frequency of training should be increased, supporting managers to keep up with latest changes and allowing more potential managers involved in leadership training programs. Based on iResearch's report (2022), nearly 30% of the surveyed graduate job seekers consider training opportunities as a key factor in their decision-making, which is consistent with the fact that Gen Z places greater emphasis on personal development opportunities. Regarding the content of leadership training, new materials related to updated expectations and needs of Gen Z managers and employees need to be added into existing system, apart from basic management skills and leadership methods. Additionally, personalized courses depending on the combination of stages which managers stand, capabilities, knowledge and experience they have, rather than merely their position level, are more necessary (Wang, 2018).

#### **4.3.2. A wider variety of training formats**

With the advancement of technologies, many new technologies can be applied to training to enhance the real-time interaction and engagement, eventually leading to more effective and high-quality outcomes (Wang, 2018). For example, role-playing practices help managers easily understand and master relevant skills more quickly, enabling them to better apply what they have learned in future work.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study analyzes the existing leadership training system in Bilibili and provides suggestions on optimization of this system. With over 90% of employees from Generation Z, Bilibili is facing new challenges in leadership training. Generation Z employees have different expectations and needs of leadership in workplace compared with previous generations. Generally, current leadership training programs in Bilibili are designed for separate position levels. Taking characteristics of Generation Z into consideration, the existing leadership training programs might not be effective and personalized in terms of both current training content and forms. Additionally, based on analysis in this study, lack of comprehensive evaluations and ongoing feedback are another two problems that have negative effects on improvement of quality and effectiveness of current leadership training system. In order to provide high-quality and targeted leadership training for managers from Generation Z in different departments, Bilibili can optimize its leadership training system based on Situational Leadership Model, offering more diverse and tailored courses, improving assessments systems and using more innovative methods other than lectures to enhance effectiveness and engagement of training programs. At the same time, considering employees' personal growth and goals, Bilibili may conduct constant and comprehensive assessments of managers to adjust training courses accordingly and maximize their performance in workplace.

Generation Z employees have already become the majority of workforce in many industries. However, most research is still focused on traditional methods in leadership training. This study took Bilibili as an example, providing innovative insights for corporate trainers and managers in leadership training in a generation Z- dominated workplace to improve current training programs.

Analysis in this study is primarily based on published reports by Bilibili. Certain limitations should be acknowledged that detailed information about existing leadership training programs is inadequate, including frequency of each program and specific training content. In further studies, structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews can be involved to evaluate effectiveness and quality of existing leadership training programs. Additionally, further research, not only focused on Bilibili, but also extending to multiple corporations, can provide deeper insights of leadership development and optimal approaches targeted on different situations.

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