# LEADERSHIP 2022

## INSIGHT AND FORESIGHT FROM THE SURVEY'S SECOND-YEAR FINDINGS.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**BUCCINO LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE,** the recipient of the 2022 Outstanding Program awarded by the Association of Leadership Educators, joins the elite list of previous awardees including Rice University, Virginia Tech, Purdue, Texas A&M, and last year's winner Notre Dame. The Institute continues to strive to be a thought leader in leadership and leadership development. To that end, the Institute launched groundbreaking research in 2021 in the field of leadership. This longitudinal research specifically examines the insights and foresights of those beginning their professional lives. Heretofore, leadership research tended to center on C-suite executives, either on their own behaviors or as observed by those who report to them or by other stakeholders. There was a significant gap in the literature on how the next generation viewed leadership and how best to develop leaders of tomorrow.

This, we believed, was a serious omission in research for two reasons. First, the absence of research did not help guide organizations on how they may want to respond to the leadership aspirations and expectations of tomorrow's professionals. Second, there was concomitantly a dearth of guidance on how to develop the leaders of tomorrow based on their own wants.
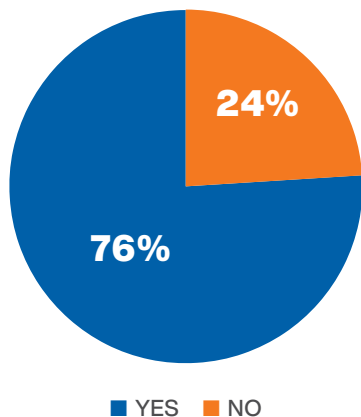
In 2021, the first year of our unique approach to studying leadership, we learned that respondents expect leaders to embrace diversity, believe that leaders can be developed and expect leaders to have strong people and engagement competencies, and they prefer high-touch leadership development models.

ILLUSTRATION 1

**HAS THE PANDEMIC IMPACTED YOUR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT?**



24%

76%

■ YES  ■ NO

To track the development of leadership insights and foresights of this group and provide this important longitudinal perspective, we reissued the survey in January 2022. The 2021 survey instrument was modified to probe into leadership development in the face of remote work.

The results of the 2022 survey are largely consistent with the previous year with respect to physical traits, values, competencies and challenges faced by a leader. The consistency of results points to a stability of perspective, even with respondents living through the pandemic and then subsequently emerging from it. In this article, we discuss how our findings on personality traits, especially hair, have contributed to the national discussion on the Create a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair (CROWN) Act. Further, we discuss our findings about the impact of remote work on leadership development, which has also become part of the national dialogue and provides actionable insights for organizations.
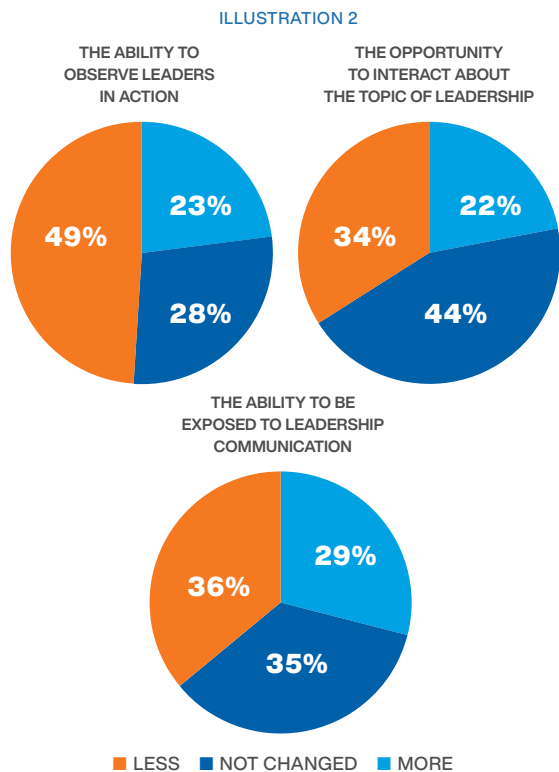
## RESEARCH DESIGN

Recognizing the persistent gap in leadership scholarship centered on the perspectives of college students aged 25 or younger, we again surveyed these students about leadership and leaders. The survey questions focused on the personality traits of respondents and a known leader they admire. We again asked about the relevant physical traits of leaders, nested in the prior traits research, some of which is more than 50 years old. From there, survey questions were constructed to seek respondents' input on important competencies and values of the mid-level leader. These questions were posed to obtain a

ILLUSTRATION 2

**THE ABILITY TO OBSERVE LEADERS IN ACTION**

**THE OPPORTUNITY TO INTERACT ABOUT THE TOPIC OF LEADERSHIP**

23%
49%
28%

22%
34%
44%

**THE ABILITY TO BE EXPOSED TO LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION**

29%
36%
35%

■ LESS ■ NOT CHANGED ■ MORE

form of leadership trajectory for young leaders. In other words, we would learn what competencies and values would be important in a leadership position they envisioned 10 years or so into their own future, as well as the competencies and values they would seek from their own boss. From there, the survey instrument put forth questions on the emotional and social skills required of leaders, as well as challenges facing future leaders. There was also a series of questions posed on how best to develop leaders of tomorrow. In addition, the original survey instrument of 2021 was enhanced to include a question on the

impact of the pandemic on leadership development. Finally, respondents replied to a set of demographic and work experience questions.

In January 2022, more than 9,000 Seton Hall University college students and recent graduates, all under the age of 25, were sent electronic copies of the survey instrument. The University's social media accounts were leveraged to invite responses to the survey. The survey was also shared with the members of the national business fraternity Alpha Kappa Psi. Several reminders were also sent. More than 800 completed surveys were returned.

## INSIGHT 1
### Remote Work Threatens Leadership Development

We added a new question in the 2022 survey to understand if Gen Z has experienced a lack of leadership development at work because of remote work.

Unfortunately, the answer is "yes," with 76 percent of the respondents saying so. *(See Illustration 1)*

Fortunately, this research also provides practical insights on how to mitigate the ill effects of remote work on this critical development. The respondents to the survey, those from 18 to 25 years old, agree that the pandemic and the shift it created in work habits has negatively impacted their own growth as leaders. These diminished growth opportunities included:

**1.** The inability to observe the role model impact leaders have on respondents' leadership development, including seeing the leaders in action and their communication style. *(See Illustration 2)*

**2.** The inability to have access to all-important high-touch leadership development opportunities, as well as access to leading initiatives and learning informally about job progression opportunities. *(See Illustration 3)*

It is evident that with remote work, organizations

ILLUSTRATION 3

**THE ABILITY TO GAIN ACCESS TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

22%
45%
33%

**THE ABILITY TO GET IMMEDIATE FEEDBACK**

28%
38%
34%

**THE ABILITY TO EXPERIENCE LEADING AN INITIATIVE**

24%
39%
37%

**THE ABILITY TO BE EXPOSED TO COLLABORATIVE WORK**

31%
37%
32%

**THE ABILITY TO BE EXPOSED TO OPPORTUNITIES THAT HELP DEVELOP INTERPERSONAL SKILLS**

30%
36%
34%

■ LESS ■ NOT CHANGED ■ MORE

**ILLUSTRATION 4**
## VALUES AND CHARACTER TRAITS (% IN TOP 3)

| Trait | % |
|---|---|
| ADMITS MISTAKES | 42% |
| IS ETHICAL | 40% |
| PERSISTS DESPITE FAILURE | 38% |
| RECOGNIZES DIGNITY OF EMPLOYEES | 38% |
| IS A CONTINUOUS LEARNER | 36% |
| PURSUES EXCELLENCE | 35% |
| IS AUTHENTIC | 33% |
| SEEKS DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES | 28% |
| MAKES HARD CHOICES IN THE FACE OF RESISTANCE | 25% |
| IS EMPATHETIC | 25% |
| ENCOURAGES OPEN DIALOGUE | 18% |
| IS DRIVEN BY A HIGHER PURPOSE | 16% |
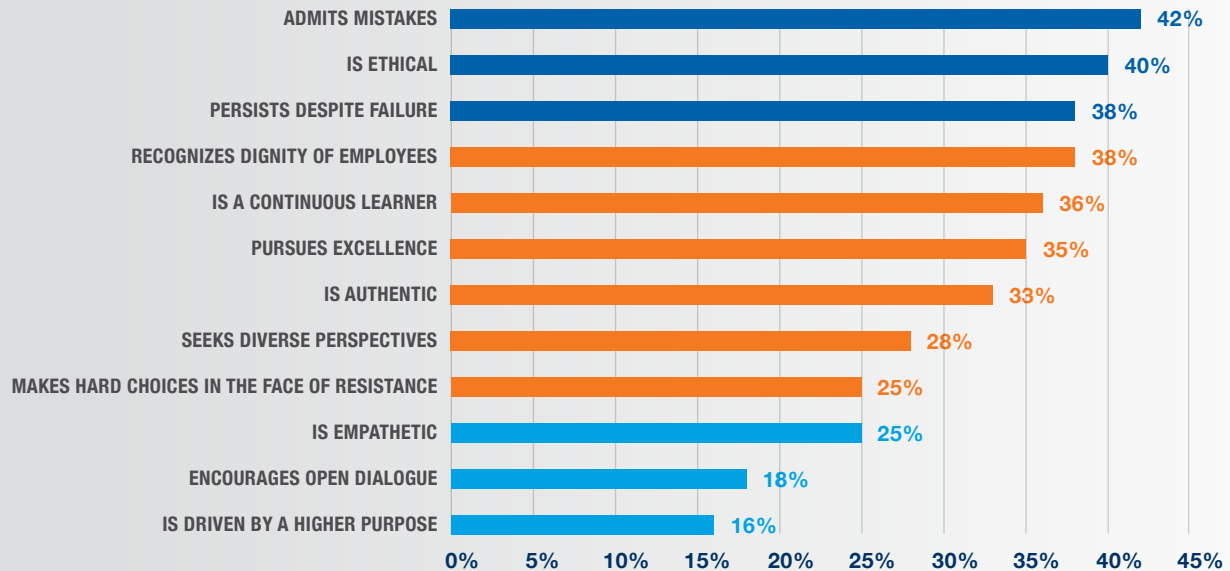
are losing daily opportunities to give feedback, express gratitude, inspire excellence and more — acts that help advance leadership development, regardless of one's formal leadership role.

The research also indicates that if firms manage to keep remote work to less than 50 percent, there is a slight positive uptick in certain leadership growth dimensions. However, if employees experience more than 50 percent of their work remotely, a negative impact on leadership development is observed.

Since the respondents value the role model impact of leaders on their own leadership development, there must be strategic consideration of the "who and when" in designing remote work arrangements. In other words, if employees' "50 percent in the office time" is coordinated to occur at the same time as others, the chances increase that today's younger generation will experience both the formal and informal instances of observing leaders. These observations include working with others, dealing with clients, working with peers and handling the many one-minute-manager interactions and the other leadership glue that keeps a team growing. More specifically, "any 50 percent" of the time is not the same as a "coordinated 50 percent" of the time. For the latter, the entering workforce can observe the contact sport that is leadership, from the many upper-level team members with whom they work.

## INSIGHT 2
### A Desire for Adaptive and Ethical Leadership

The insights on values and competencies of a leader and the challenges they face remain consistent with the 2021 survey.

**1. Values and Character Traits:** The respondents were provided a list of 12 value and character traits and asked to rank the top three traits. An ability to admit mistakes ranked the highest, followed very closely by being ethical. An ability to persist despite failure and ability to recognize the dignity of employees received equal votes. What is also of note is that "driven by higher purpose" received the least votes. These rankings indicate a desire for more human, ethical leadership. *(See Illustration 4)*

**2. Competencies of a Leader:** When asked to rate the top three competencies from a menu of choices, respondents ranked "uses observations to find and implement solutions to problems," "can innovate and help inspire change" and "is a role model who sets standards for professionalism in the organization" as the top three competencies. These would indicate a desire to see leaders as role models, change agents and problem-solvers.

We also observe that "demonstrates awareness of market trends," "demonstrates knowledge and application of financial and accounting principles" and "demonstrates

an ability to utilize technology for strategic advantage," all competencies necessary to manage business performance, did not rank as high. We conclude that respondents are not saying that these competencies are not important in a leader, but less important than an ability to inspire and lead change. Again, the results may be indicative of the challenge leaders are facing as the business environment becomes more fluid and unpredictable, and staying solvent requires continuous adaption and innovation.

Organizations should review their competency models for leadership development with these findings in mind. Any misalignment has the potential to create disharmony. In any case where there is misalignment, either the competency models need to be updated or expectations for leadership

development need to be more clearly communicated along with the why *(See Illustration 5 on page 26)*.
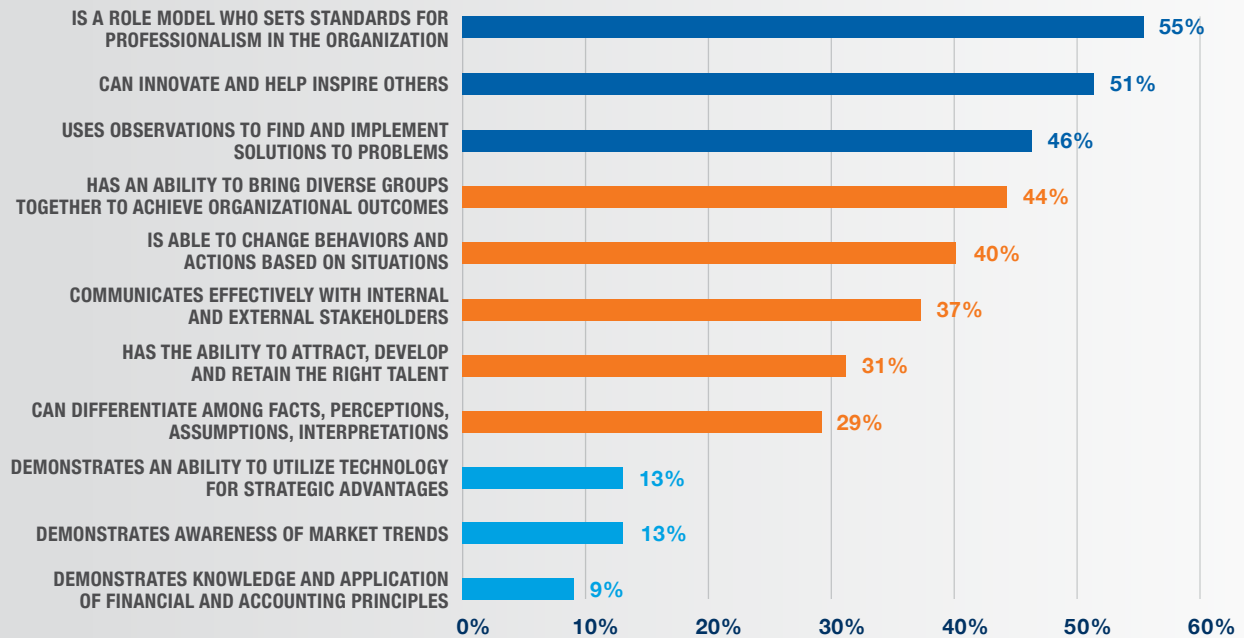
**3. Challenges Facing a Leader:** Our conclusion above — that leaders need to create ethical and adaptive organizations — is confirmed by the respondents' ranking of challenges facing leaders. The top three challenges facing leaders were identified as how to "manage work-life balance," "create ethical and socially responsible organizations" and "deal with crisis and failure." Next in ranking was "protecting organizations from external and internal risks."

To summarize, our findings indicate that the respondent set is searching for adaptive and ethical leaders that can lead in a highly volatile and disruptive business environment *(See Illustration 6 on page 27)*.

**ILLUSTRATION 5**
# COMPETENCIES OF A LEADER (% IN TOP 3)

| Competency | % |
|---|---|
| IS A ROLE MODEL WHO SETS STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONALISM IN THE ORGANIZATION | 55% |
| CAN INNOVATE AND HELP INSPIRE OTHERS | 51% |
| USES OBSERVATIONS TO FIND AND IMPLEMENT SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS | 46% |
| HAS AN ABILITY TO BRING DIVERSE GROUPS TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE ORGANIZATIONAL OUTCOMES | 44% |
| IS ABLE TO CHANGE BEHAVIORS AND ACTIONS BASED ON SITUATIONS | 40% |
| COMMUNICATES EFFECTIVELY WITH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS | 37% |
| HAS THE ABILITY TO ATTRACT, DEVELOP AND RETAIN THE RIGHT TALENT | 31% |
| CAN DIFFERENTIATE AMONG FACTS, PERCEPTIONS, ASSUMPTIONS, INTERPRETATIONS | 29% |
| DEMONSTRATES AN ABILITY TO UTILIZE TECHNOLOGY FOR STRATEGIC ADVANTAGES | 13% |
| DEMONSTRATES AWARENESS OF MARKET TRENDS | 13% |
| DEMONSTRATES KNOWLEDGE AND APPLICATION OF FINANCIAL AND ACCOUNTING PRINCIPLES | 9% |

## INSIGHT 3
### Expectations on Physical Traits of a Leader Remain Consistent with 2021 Results

Diving deeper into physical traits, the survey shows that the current generation still has expectations that their leaders should be attired appropriately for the given leadership role. In addition, they should be healthy and have well-groomed hair. Interestingly, even though ranked in the top three, those who identified as non-white judged well-groomed hair as less important than white respondents. *(See Illustration 7)*

The U.S. House of Representatives recently enacted the CROWN Act of 2022. We examined the insights from our survey to ask: Is CROWN needed?

We acknowledge that anytime we can work to reduce bias and discrimination, we move closer to the goal of all our Equal Employment Opportunity laws. The CROWN legislation aims to remove another bias: To prohibit hair discrimination throughout the workforce.

We also acknowledge that hair, regardless of the race or gender of an employee, can pose a safety or health hazard at work. As such, even without CROWN, employers can continue to set job requirements for their work. However, these requirements must have a nexus to the job, cannot run afoul of important rights under the federal Civil Rights Act and associated state-level laws, and must be applied even-handedly.

At the same time, we find that there is the recognition among leaders of tomorrow that leaders, regardless of organization, have a figurehead role in that organization, representing all who are employed there. Given that figurehead role, it seems the Gen Z cohort surveyed still places value on their leaders being attired appropriately for the organization that they lead, being healthy and having hair that is well-groomed for the position.

## CONCLUSION AND THE PATH FORWARD

The 2022 survey confirms that the discipline of leadership continues to evolve. We find that the respondents to our 2022 survey, 18- to 25-year-olds, continue to view leadership as an important topic. They are looking for ethical and adaptive leaders who can inspire and lead organizations through change as the business environment becomes even more volatile and uncertain.

Respondents do continue to believe, as professionals have for years before them, that leaders hold a figurehead role in organizations. They are open to a diverse set of leaders, but still expect them to be well-attired, healthy and with well-groomed hair, as indicated by their preferences in response to the

**ILLUSTRATION 6**

## CHALLENGES FACING LEADER (% IN TOP 3)

| Challenge | Percent |
|-----------|---------|
| MANAGE WORK-LIFE BALANCE | 53% |
| DEAL WITH CRISIS AND FAILURE | 45% |
| CREATE ETHICAL AND SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATIONS | 39% |
| PROTECT ORGANIZATIONS FROM EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL RISKS | 34% |
| CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE EMPLOYEES' WORK IS VALUED | 31% |
| KEEP ORGANIZATION FINANCIALLY VIABLE | 31% |
| ATTRACT, RECRUIT AND RETAIN TOP PERFORMERS | 31% |
| CREATE AN EMPATHETIC AND INCLUSIVE CULTURE | 29% |
| CREATE JOBS THAT PAY WELL | 26% |
| CREATE JOBS THAT PROVIDE JOB SECURITY | 24% |
| CREATE AN ADAPTIVE ORGANIZATION | 23% |
| DEVELOP A ROBUST PIPELINE OF DIVERSE LEADERSHIP TALENT | 22% |

question on physical traits. Gender, race and ethnicity-related physical characteristics do not rank as high for this generation.

They also recognize that virtual work impacts their own leadership development — and are seeking to overcome that.

Organizations and leadership development institutions should embrace these lessons and continue to find paths forward to develop future leaders. It is the most important investment they can make.

**ILLUSTRATION 7**

## PHYSICAL TRAITS

| Trait | Value |
|-------|-------|
| ATTIRE | 3.94 |
| HEALTHY | 3.43 |
| HAIR | 3.34 |
| PHYSICALLY FIT | 2.47 |
| ATTRACTIVE | 2.33 |
| HEIGHT | 2.11 |
| DEEP VOICE | 1.96 |

At the same time, we are curious as to why the respondents have ranked competencies such as financial acumen, technological savviness and market insights at the bottom of their rankings. Is it because all business leaders are expected to demonstrate these competencies and therefore assumed to be in their possession? We intend to explore this topic further in the next survey.

Additionally, during our first survey, we had some data that signaled that work experience moderated insights and foresights on leadership. With the current survey, we were not able to confirm this impact as our data set did not have an adequate sample size of those with work experience to draw any statistically valid conclusions.

To enhance the survey insights, in the third release of the survey we will expand the respondent base to include 18- to 30-year-olds to measure the impact that any amount of experience might have on views and expectations of leadership.

That way, we will not only get insights from the generation getting ready to enter the workforce, but also those who have already gained some work experience.

Additionally, we are looking for partners for our next survey to broaden its outreach. If your organization is interested, please contact the research team at *ruchin.kansal@shu.edu* or *karen.boroff@shu.edu*. **L**