



halogen  
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building young leaders  
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# NAVIGATING A VOLATILE WORLD:

## PREPARING OUR YOUTH FOR THE FUTURE



A Report by Halogen Foundation (Singapore)



# PREFACE

The world that we live in is in a state of constant change. The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies, the climate crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing geopolitical conflicts — these are just a few events that have occurred in the past decade but have shaped the way we live in drastic ways. Looking ahead, we expect increasing disruptive shifts to occur that will continue to reshape the future landscape. Putting ourselves in the shoes of a young person, this can be daunting to behold.

There are currently 1.12 billion young people between the ages of 15 and 24 on earth, and this figure is expected to grow to nearly 1.3 billion by 2030.<sup>1</sup> Though they are coming to age in a world filled with crises, they are also the ones best placed to lead with their creativity, idealism, and resilience. Young people are our future, and on this end, there is a pressing need to invest in them to prepare them to take the helm of our economy, country, and world.

We believe youth development organisations and practitioners also need to adapt our approaches to the changing context of youth. We need to remain focused on articulating clear developmental outcomes of our youth programmes, while taking into account the diverse contexts a young person may grow up in. A key aspect in achieving this is to understand what youths of today need in order to thrive in the future. Last year, we commissioned an internal study to identify key attributes that young people need in order to lead well. The result is an Attributes-Based Development Framework that articulates what is required to build up young people holistically, to ensure they have the right character, mindsets, and skill sets that set them up for success. We hope that this framework can be a means for us and other youth practitioners and organisations to have a language we can use to talk about youth development, and work towards filling in the gaps and supporting the young people we serve.



# CONTENTS

<b>THE MANY CHALLENGES OF YOUTH</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>RAISING A NEW GENERATION OF LEADERS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>HALOGEN'S ATTRIBUTES-BASED DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>BRINGING CLARITY TO YOUTH DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>ENDNOTES</b>	<b>14</b>

# THE MANY CHALLENGES OF YOUTH

## 46%

of Gen Zs are stressed or anxious all or most of the time

Today, as young people grapple with the complexities and uncertainties around them, **they face increasing levels of fear, anxiety, stress and anger.** Deloitte's report on the mental health of Gen Zs and millennials found that 46% of Gen Zs say they are stressed or anxious all or most of the time.<sup>2</sup> 39% of those who regularly experience stress or anxiety note that concerns about their mental health contribute a lot to those feelings, and Gen Zs ranked the mental health of their generation as their fourth greatest concern overall. Similarly, a series of surveys and interviews conducted by McKinsey finds that **Gen Zs have the least positive life outlook, and have lower levels of emotional and social well-being** compared to older generations.<sup>3</sup> 1 in 4 reported feeling more emotionally distressed, and 58% reported having 2 or more unmet social needs (including income, employment, education, food, housing, transportation, social support, and safety).

**There is a looming sense of pessimism for what young people expect to come in the future.**

## 49%

of Gen Zs are concerned about their current job roles being replaced by technology

With regard to the future of work, there are growing concerns about the impact of technology. In a Global Workforce Hopes and Fears survey conducted by PwC, findings indicated that though young people are aware of the opportunities that technology brings, they are also the **generation most likely to be concerned about how technology will affect their jobs.**<sup>4</sup> In Singapore, nearly half (49%) of Gen Zs are concerned about their current job roles being replaced by technology in the next 3 years.<sup>5</sup> In addition, in parts of Southeast Asia, the impact of the pandemic on labour markets has led to a surge in unemployment rates, alongside reductions in working hours and wages. Unemployment was already a youth problem in Southeast Asia before the pandemic, but youths are now three times more likely to be unemployed, raising **concerns and anxiety among youths in terms of job attainment and security.**<sup>6</sup>

Separately, rising geopolitical tensions have sparked anxiety and concerns over the future among youths. In the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, 67% of young people in Singapore expressed concerns about the war in Ukraine, and 71% were worried that the war will spread to other countries.<sup>7</sup>

With the evolving economic, digital, cultural, political and environmental shifts, **the space that youths play in is multidimensional and complex.** If this is not handled carefully, the fears and worries that they have about their future can be destabilising and debilitating, causing them to struggle greatly along the way.



# RAISING A NEW GENERATION OF LEADERS

**“We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future”**

- former American President Franklin D. Roosevelt

The road ahead is paved with complexity and uncertainty. New challenges will continue to emerge and entwine; and young people will learn that the obstacles they face may not always be addressed in isolation, one by one. As the world evolves, **youths need to take a multimodal approach to tackling challenges**. They need to be aware of what is required of them, and be sufficiently equipped to face the challenges of tomorrow.

Our young people cannot achieve this on their own. **Preparing our youths for the future is a multipronged task and a shared responsibility**. The touchpoints that a young person has with their family, school, community, and workplace all play a part in providing support and guidance. This forms an ecosystem for positive youth development.

Halogen is committed to helping young people succeed. We believe that young people have the ability to exercise personal capacity to make a difference, and to positively influence situations and relationships regardless of their position, resource, or power. As the world around us evolves, we want young people to establish a strong foundation in their character, mindsets, and skill sets, upon which they can exercise leadership, and flourish in their communities.

**When a young person exercises leadership, it can extend to three main areas:**



## LEAD SELF

To lead themselves well, young people need to be clear of what their personal values and belief systems are, for these ultimately translate to their behaviour and actions



## LEAD OTHERS

To lead others, young people need to possess strong socio-emotional skills to be able to work with others with different strengths and viewpoints

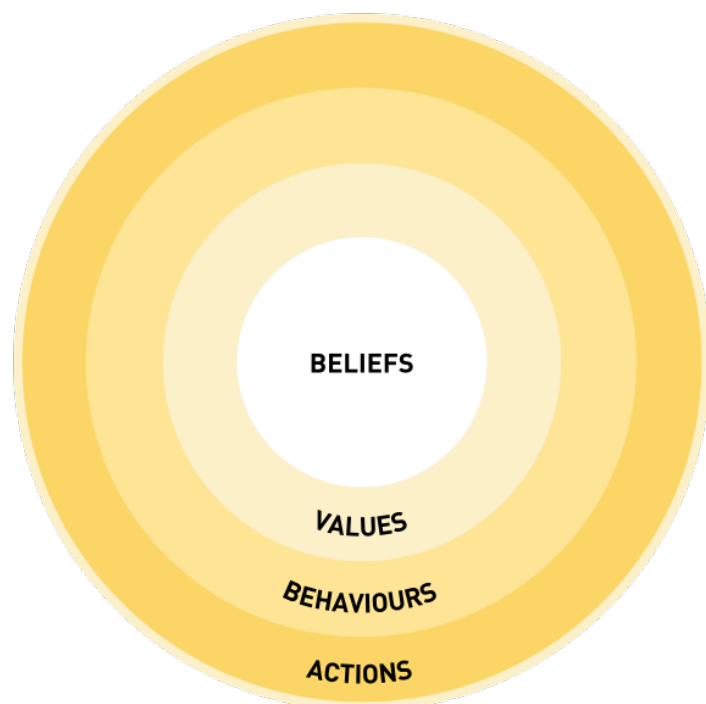


## LEAD CHANGE

To lead change, young people need to be in touch with what's happening in the world; they have passion and purpose in their causes, and are competent to mobilise resources strategically for it

**In these dimensions, we recognise that there is a need to look at a young person's development holistically.**

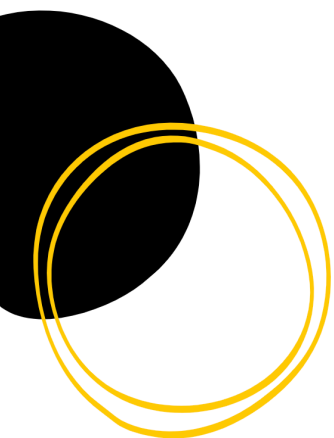
Drawing from our **Beliefs, Values, Behaviours, Actions (BVBA) model** below, the sustainable development that we hope to see in our youths happens from the inside out. A person's belief system will largely affect their values, behaviours, and actions. There will be skills that young people need to adapt and perform, but it is also necessary to ensure that they have the right beliefs and that they are rooted in a sense of morality, with an internal compass to guide how they utilise these skills.



**Raising young people who can lead themselves, lead others, and lead change well is a challenging task.**

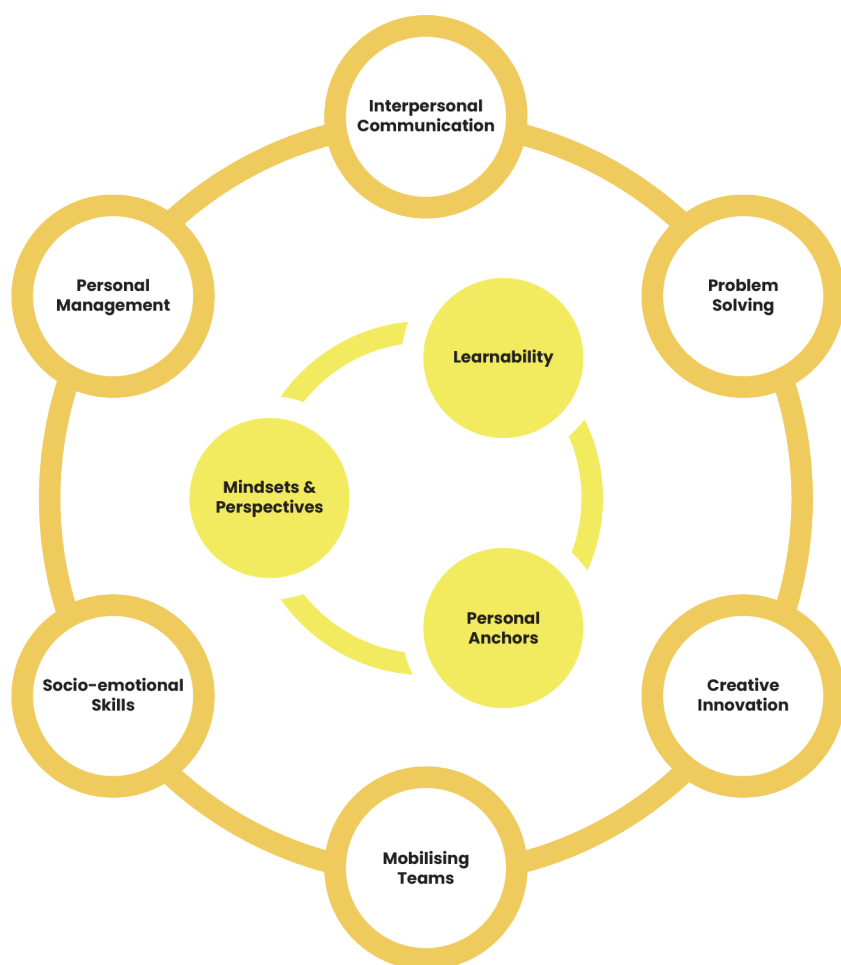
Each individual is different: they have different dispositions, are raised in different environments, and have different aspirations as to what it means for them to thrive. As such, our Attributes-Based Development Framework helps to shed light on what is needed to build our young leaders and create an identifiable, consistent, and testable means to develop our youth.

# HALOGEN'S ATTRIBUTES-BASED DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK



From our research across academic journals, books, and leading voices for the future of work and leadership, coupled with Halogen Foundation's experience in the youth development sector, we first identified a list of attributes (a mix of characteristics, mindsets, and skill sets) that are key to a young person's development. Next, to help us distil and make sense of the various attributes needed, we sought to classify these attributes into selected categories.

**The result is a framework we crafted below that classifies these attributes into two broad spheres, further broken down into nine domains.**



## INNER SPHERE

Attributes that address the individual's mindsets, beliefs, and value systems

## OUTER SPHERE

Attributes that address the skills for influencing people and situations



## INNER SPHERE: Three Domains of Internal Calibration

As a young person seeks to lead themselves well, it is important for them to have clarity about their beliefs and values, and adopt positive frames of mind in order to make informed decisions and take meaningful action. In this sphere, we identified three domains of internal calibration — attributes that address the individual's mindsets, beliefs, and value systems.



### MINDSETS AND PERSPECTIVES

*This domain comprises attributes that deal with how we view ourselves, such as a growth mindset, self-esteem, and self-efficacy*

Mindsets are a set of assumptions that help us distil complex worldviews into digestible information and then set expectations based on this input<sup>8</sup>. Stanford professor Carol Dweck's research reveals that **the view an individual adopts for themselves profoundly affects the way they lead their lives.**<sup>9</sup> It can determine whether they become the person they want to be and whether they accomplish the things they value. People's beliefs about their ability to perform in different situations can influence how they feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave.<sup>10</sup> It informs an individual's perception of their ability to perform a particular behaviour, or ability to prevent, control, or cope with potential difficulties that one might encounter. For a young person who is in the midst of forming their self-identity, and struggling to cope with the stresses and anxieties that life brings, developing the right mindsets becomes crucial to bolstering our youth in countering self-defeating thoughts, and guiding them in making positive decisions.



### PERSONAL ANCHORS

*This domain comprises attributes that deal with our inner drives and values such as integrity, moral courage, and grit*

**The values that we ground ourselves in determine who we want to be, how we live our lives, and how we interact with our community.** They are the guiding principles that underpin what we believe to be important when making decisions in all areas of private and public life.<sup>11</sup> As a young person navigates through life, having clarity on what they value, and what they are driven by can help them be more prepared to make decisions for themselves, and inspire them to become the person they want to be. In Singapore's Ministry of Education's framework for 21st Century Competencies, core values are highlighted at the centre of the framework.<sup>12</sup> In order to nurture a confident, self-directed, concerned citizen, and active contributor, it is important to place an emphasis on values, as these shape a young person's competencies. Focusing on values also supports youths by giving them a compass to take ownership of their personal actions, giving them a boost to persevere through the various obstacles life may throw at them.



## LEARNABILITY

*This domain comprises attributes that deal with how we approach the act of learning such as lifelong learning, intellectual humility, and learning agility*

A lifelong learner is someone who consciously and continuously seeks to learn to enhance quality of life, both their own and that of society, and this has long been valued and encouraged. Today, as the world continues to evolve, **it is imperative to build lifelong learners who can learn, unlearn, and relearn in order to find and retain productive work, make wise decisions, and positively engage in their communities.**<sup>13</sup> With the rise of generative AI, several job roles are under threat of being replaced by machines and robots. As AI and other rapidly advancing technologies emerge, the skill sets that we have today may soon be outdated and there may be new skills that we will need to adopt to keep up with the changes. Recognising this, the Singapore Government launched the SkillsFuture Initiative to catalyse a love for learning and ensure workers undergo continual skills upgrading to maintain a competitive edge amidst technological advancements and stronger global competition for jobs.<sup>14</sup> For young people to stay relevant and competitive in our ever-changing world, they need to actively seek to expand their knowledge, to develop a desire and humility to continuously learn.



## OUTER SPHERE: Six Domains of External Mastery

As a young person seeks to lead others and lead change, they need to be able to work well with others and rally people to their cause. The ability to exercise strong interpersonal and management skills and be active problem solvers is key as they strive towards their goals. In this sphere, we identified six domains of external mastery — attributes that address the skills for influencing people and situations.



### PERSONAL MANAGEMENT

*This domain comprises attributes that deal with our ability to control our feelings, thoughts and actions such as self-management, and opportunistic*

As young people mature, they start to face increasing responsibilities to juggle and are put in positions where they have to navigate decisions independently. To manage these challenges, **young people need to be able to make choices that are well-thought-through and determine the best course of action to take for themselves.** In addition, the pandemic has pushed youths to grapple with a lack of structure as their typical school experience changes. With more companies adopting a hybrid or remote work arrangement, youths can expect less structure in their future jobs. To adapt to these changes, young people ought to have the skills and techniques in place to give them the confidence to motivate, manage, and depend on themselves, especially when faced with obstacles and uncertainty<sup>15</sup>. They need to be equipped to manage their behaviours, thoughts, and emotions in a conscious and productive way. By taking responsibility for their behaviour and well-being, and learning to set independent goals, young people are then able to lead themselves and others well.



### SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS

*This domain comprises attributes that deal with how we understand ourselves and relate to others, such as emotional intelligence, and intercultural effectiveness*

**Socio-emotional skills are key to successfully navigating one's life.**

They have been shown to influence experiences and achievements in all spheres of life, be it academic achievement, job performance, or personal and societal well-being.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, socio-emotional skills are also found to have persistent and cumulative effects on other attributes, including cognitive skills.<sup>17</sup> For example, good social competence can help youths adapt better to their school environment, gain higher status among their peers, and achieve more in school. In our increasingly fast-changing and diverse world, socio-emotional skills are becoming more important. Young people need to be able to adjust and adapt to evolving environments; they are also called to show empathy and generosity in order to cooperate with others for the common good. Socio-emotional learning is also an integral part of Singapore's Ministry of Education's framework for 21st Century Competencies.<sup>18</sup> In having strong socio-emotional skills, young people are better able to develop personal and cultural effectiveness, build positive relationships, live out their values, and grow their character.





## INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

*This domain comprises attributes that deal with how we communicate with others such as persuasion, and assertiveness*

Humans have a fundamental, powerful, and universal drive to interact with one another. It is intrinsic to our health and happiness. For a young person to lead well, **the ability to effectively exchange information, ideas, and feelings through verbal or non-verbal methods enables young people to create and maintain meaningful relationships with others.** However, the recent COVID-19 pandemic saw many across the world become isolated at home, with limited social interaction with others. As a result, young people missed out on opportunities to form and build relationships in their schools and communities. This poses new challenges to them as they attempt to reconnect with others post-pandemic. In TODAY's Youth Survey, it was reported that 54% of the respondents said they have become less sociable compared to before the pandemic.<sup>19</sup> As we move to a more virtual world that uses digital tools and social networks as a main mode of interaction, the way we communicate with others has also evolved. One key barrier to having our communication mediated via an online platform is that it limits our non-verbal cues, which may lead to misunderstandings. With these changes and challenges in communication, young people need to acquire and build interpersonal communication skills that they can utilise to communicate effectively with others through different platforms and situations.



## MOBILISING TEAMS

*This domain encompasses attributes that deal with how we rally people together, and enable others to perform such as people, and team management and accountability*

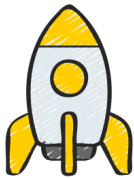
For youths to successfully lead others and lead change, their ability to collaborate and rally others to their cause is a key aspect of their leadership. As they strive to enact social change through ground-up initiatives, **it is imperative that they can create an environment that unites and motivates a team, and collectively drive powerful results through teamwork.** This requires young people to have skills in building trust, mitigating conflict, encouraging communication, and increasing collaboration.<sup>20</sup> In the workplace, the pandemic has prompted companies to shift towards more home-based or flexi-work environments, while globalisation has increased engagements with offshore teams. These shifts have led to the rise of virtual platforms, which adds layers of complexity and challenge to the way we communicate and work with others. Young people now also need to adapt and find ways to effectively engage and lead in an increasingly hybrid environment.



## PROBLEM SOLVING

*This domain comprises attributes that drive cognitive thinking and reasoning, such as complex problem solving and critical and analytical thinking*

Living in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world, we can expect the emergence of new problems that our young people need to tackle. One example would be the recent geopolitical tensions that have been building up globally. As countries seek to navigate these tensions, some may be called to take sides or make tough decisions. When geopolitics is discussed on social media, it tends to be distilled into short sound bites that are not historically anchored, and seldom allow for a young person who is consuming the news to undergo thorough analysis.<sup>21</sup> On a broader level, with the influx of massive, globalised information flow through the Internet and social media, as well as the pressure and potential threats posed by disinformation, the ability to discern and dissect the complexities of disinformation is crucial as a young person navigates content online.<sup>22</sup> This is the space that young people will increasingly find themselves playing in moving forward. **Their ability to identify problems, think critically, and implement solutions thus becomes crucial in ensuring they are ready and equipped to solve problems as and when they come.**



## CREATIVE INNOVATION

*This domain comprises attributes that deal with how we generate new or alternative ideas, such as creativity and innovation*

In recent years, creative skills have been identified as the key to our future economies.<sup>23</sup> With automation on the rise, anything that can be automated has been or will soon be automated. As AI continues to become a bigger part of our world, routine and process-driven jobs will soon become even more obsolete and handed over to machines. Companies are now more interested in finding people who can think of new and better solutions. Hence, young people need to be able to create ideas beyond the status quo and develop them into something useful and practical to remain relevant in the workplace.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, as young people struggle to cope with uncertainty and complexity, creative thinking becomes all the more valuable, as it enables them to view things in a new light, look for deeper meaning, and understand the big picture of things.<sup>25</sup> **Their ability to push the boundaries of their thinking even when they seem counterintuitive or outside the box can boost their problem-solving skills, and inspire others towards a vision for positive change in the future.**



## BRINGING CLARITY TO YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

We have put together this toolkit of attributes within our Attributes-Based Development Framework to provide a means of identifying, articulating, and validating youth development outcomes of our programmes in a consistent and targeted manner. As we continue to offer content, experiences, and learning opportunities for young people to help them become future-ready, the established Attributes-Based language now provides youths and youth enablers with a common vocabulary and academic knowledge to articulate the needs and gaps of youth development within the various contexts of our partners. The spheres and domains serve to map out a holistic approach to developing youths, and ensure that they are equipped to lead well in their own spheres of influence.

The road ahead is paved with complexity and uncertainty, but we have an obligation to do our best to pay forward to our next generation the values, perspectives, and learnings on how to make our future a better place. We need collective effort to move the needle, and this is possible if we play our parts and collaborate with a shared vision. Let us work together to raise young people who will step up and effect positive change in their communities!

**We are happy to partner with other youth organisations, schools, or individuals to further our research and the work that we are doing and build an ecosystem to develop key attributes in our youth. We can also partner with you in assessing your youth development needs, and look for solutions on both assessment and programme fronts.**

If you have any questions or comments on our framework, or if you would like to engage or work with us, we are open to having a chat with you. You may contact us at [impact@halogen.sg](mailto:impact@halogen.sg).





## ENDNOTES

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